

INCREASING THE AWARENESS OF TRAUMA ON
EXPERIENCE OF GOD AND WORSHIP AT
ALLEN TEMPLE AME CHURCH

Timothy W. Storms Sr.

Bachelor, Allen University, 1999
M.Div., Candler School of Theology, 2002

Faculty Mentor
Leroy Cothran, DMin

A FINAL DOCUMENT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dayton, Ohio
December, 2016

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ABSTRACT

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by

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The context of this project is contained within an African Methodist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. The identified problem is there are many within the body that have experienced trauma and are not aware of its effect on their experience of God and worship. The hypothesis is that if the issue of trauma is not addressed, healing cannot begin, and a relationship with God and worship will be adversely affected. The results of the data analysis revealed that participants were willing to submit to God's will concerning trauma and emerge as persons healed and ready to worship God devoid their traumatic experience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are times when words appear to be inadequate to express the gratitude and appreciation one attempts to convey. To whosoever shall read these do know that they emanate from the deepest most sacred space within my heart.

I must begin by giving honor and praise to God, the creator and sustainer of all that is. The call that God placed on my life has led me to this place and on this journey his love, grace, and mercy has kept and provided for me.

I thank and praise God for my children Timothy Jr., Krystal, and Joi along with my number one grandson Timothy III. (Trey). In this often tedious and time-consuming journey they have encouraged, supported and tolerated me every step of the way.

To the greatest mentors United Seminary has ever had Dr. C. Robert Walker and Rev. Dr. Kenneth Cummings are not only mentors but also sojourners along the way. Their willingness to get into the muck and the mire with each student is second to none. Often times they believed in me and could see the project when I did not believe in myself and could not even see light at the end of the tunnel. Dr. Walker and Dr. Cummings never gave up on my process or me. They were always available to critique, inspire, encourage, and challenge even through the darkest of times. Their leadership, commitment, and devotion has created an environment where they are not only mentors but family.

I must offer a special word of thanks to my Pastor and church family, the Rev. Dr. Alphonse Allen Jr. and the Allen Temple AME Church Cincinnati and my Supervisor at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center Fr. Martin Smith-Soucier. Your support has been unwavering through countless hours of individual and group meetings, vision and writing challenges not to mention plain old doubt. To say you had my back would be an understatement. Thanks for being in this process with me.

Finally, to my fellow peers in the Prophetic Preaching and Praxis group, both those that have graduated, those still engaged in the struggle and those yet to come. As we have gathered in various communities and settings to fellowship and grow each of you has shared your struggles, strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for growth. There were times when we prayed through, cried through, sang through, shouted through and sometimes just sat through until the breakthrough came. What you have poured into me as we have journeyed together is immeasurable and priceless. Each of you will forever be in my thoughts and prayers.

The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old,
but on building the new.

—Socrates

INTRODUCTION

For many, life is viewed as polar opposites. There are those who have no cares or concerns and appear to be doing better and getting more than those who seek to do the right thing. There are those who, at all cost, seek to obtain as much as possible, regardless of those who are injured, maimed or killed in the process.

The above dichotomy clearly illustrate a need and desire to create a sacred space for those who suffer in silence, to empower sufferers to speak up, and to demonstrate to the masses that sufferers have more in common with non-sufferers than they have that separate them. This revelation can be made possible when the kingdom of God called church is willing to transcend to a higher level of service within the congregation and community in which we are privileged serve.

Active, critical reflection has revealed issues of trauma, pain and confusion that can be used to the glory of God in kingdom building if sufferers can develop the strength to surrender to God's good and perfect will.

Evidence suggests that trauma can produce both positive and negative effects on the spiritual experiences and perceptions of individuals. For example, depression and loneliness can lead to feelings of abandonment and loss of faith in God. These effects may change as time passes and a person moves further away from the acute phase of trauma recovery. On the positive side, some individuals experience increased appreciation of life, greater perceived closeness to God, increased sense of purpose in life, and enhanced spiritual well-being even following devastating events such as disasters and

rape. For others, trauma can be associated with loss of faith, diminished participation in religious or spiritual activities, changes in belief, feelings of being abandoned or punished by God, and loss of meaning and purpose for living.¹

Aspects of spirituality are associated with positive outcomes, even when trauma survivors develop psychiatric difficulties such as PTSD or depression. Research also indicates that healthy spirituality is often associated with lower levels of symptoms and clinical problems in some trauma populations. For example, anger, rage, and a desire for revenge following trauma may be tempered by forgiveness, spiritual beliefs, or spiritual practices.²

Suggestions have been made about the pathways by which spirituality might affect the recovery trajectory for survivors of traumatic events. Spirituality may improve post-trauma outcomes through: 1) reduction of behavioral risks through healthy religious lifestyles (e.g., less drinking or smoking); 2) expanded social support through involvement in spiritual communities; 3) enhancement of coping skills and helpful ways of understanding trauma that result in meaning-making; and 4) physiological mechanisms such as activation of the "relaxation response" through prayer or meditation.³

Feelings of isolation, loneliness, and depression related to grief and loss may be lessened by the social support of a spiritual community. Being part of a spiritual community places survivors among caring individuals who may provide encouragement

¹ US Department of Veterans Affairs, "Spirituality and Trauma: Professionals Working Together," August 15, 2015, <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/provider-type/community/fs-spirituality.asp>

² "Spirituality and Trauma."

³ "Spirituality and Trauma."

and emotional support, as well as possible instrumental support in the form of physical or even financial assistance in times of trouble.

Chapter one discusses the synergy of the project and provides the basis for problem solving. In this chapter, the journey of the writer and the problems of the context are identified in an effort to provide a basis of problem solving that is grounded in identified foundations to provide solutions to the problem of the context.

Chapter two is the biblical foundations. In this chapter, biblical exegesis is performed on Old and New Testament scriptures that uncover the problems and solution as contained in scripture.

In chapter three, the historical foundations, the reader will be exposed to how the problem of the context has been dealt with over the span of history and how the problem has been resolved over time.

Chapter four contains the theological foundations. The theological foundations represent how scholars and theologians have grappled with God in the face of trauma and the need for wholeness.

Chapter five, the theoretical foundations will uncover various solutions of trauma and how trauma can be resolved in ways that bring wholeness to those who suffer. In this chapter, the reader will examine how various writers have sought to solve the problem of trauma in wholistic ways.

Chapter six, project analysis, will show how the problem of trauma is dealt with in the context of a specific AME church and how the outcomes of the data analysis can be used to solve the problem in other congregations who are experiencing similar problems with trauma.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

What do you believe? Why do you believe it? These were the questions raised for a group of wide-eyed, unsure, and weary first semester students at the Candler School of Theology at the conclusion of a class on Systematic Theology in August 1999. Following an electrifying and mesmerizing lecture, Professor Noel Erskine, in his amusing Caribbean accent framed the assignment like this...when we next meet, I want five pages on your tenets of faith. The initial thought that flashed through my mind was that I was in over my head again. What now?

After class, I approached Professor Erskine confused about the assignment he had given. Chuckling aloud, Dr. Erskine responded by saying just tell me what you believe and why you believe it.

As a teacher and spiritual guide of veterans of the United States Armed Forces, the opportunity often presents itself to raise the question, “Who are you?” In these unique teaching moments, the responses from the veterans are varied and encompass a wide range of accomplishments along with distinguishing characteristics that many feel set them apart. For instance, more often than not, when presented with the question, “Who are you,” veterans respond, I am a marine or soldier. I am a parent, or spouse. I am an electrician or seabee (a carpenter). I am a mechanic on M60 tanks or F-18 fighter jets.

My response to these statements is usually, “Yes; these are things you have done, but who are you? What is the core of your essence? While all of these accomplishments and characteristics are great, it does not reveal to me who you really are.”

Most soldiers list accomplishments, characteristics, and abilities when asked who they are. However, deep, critical reflection is required to delve into the depths of the essence of personhood. Deep, critical reflection will lead to discovering significant transformative moments, both spiritual and carnal. These moments give substance and sustenance to those who seek to verbalize who they are outside of their abilities, characteristics, and accomplishments.

Ironically, similar feelings of anxiety and anguish presented themselves to me during my first semester in the Doctor of Ministry program at United Theological Seminary. However, instead of asking for what I believe and why it is believed, my assignment was to critically and actively reflect on those life instances that have shaped me as a person and impacted me spiritually. Succinctly put, my assignment was to write my spiritual Autobiography.

Critical and active reflection has identified areas of abuse, abandonment and the anointing of God as circumstances that have shaped me as a spiritual being and as a person. In this paper, the question of “Who am I,” will be answered by reflecting on my life and the significant lived experiences that have impacted my spirituality and are shaping the person I am becoming. This will be accomplished by examining the early years, the tragedies experienced, life’s transitional points, the call to ministry, and the subsequent spiritual developments encountered on this journey.

The Early Years

Growing up on the east side of Cleveland in the late 1960's and early 1970's was a blessing. As the youngest of three children born to the union of the Reverend Joseph W. Storms, Jr., and G. Roberta Long Storms, life was full of adventure, opportunity and possibility. Reared on a small street called Kempton Avenue, off of 105th Street between Superior and St. Claire Avenues in the community known as Glenville, Cleveland was thriving in its own right. In a real sense, Cleveland was a city of well-kept secrets. Few people knew, for instance, that Cleveland has one of the best park systems in the country. Cleveland has also played a key role in automotive and aeronautical technology through General Motors and NASA, business systems through IBM and Xerox, the insurance industry as well as being the home of many critically acclaimed universities and hospitals that are surrounded by several of the world's greatest museums from art to natural history and science to automotive and aviation.

Kempton Avenue is a three-block street paved with bricks until the early 1970's. It is a tree-lined community that was a mixture of professional and blue-collar workers. Although a predominately African American community, there were a few other ethnicities interspersed throughout the neighborhood. On the block where I lived were a medical physician, a blue-collar city worker, an insurance professional, a business owner, and several teachers. It seemed as if everyone knew one another, therefore, it was relatively easy to identify those who were not from the community. Violence and crime were relatively low for an inner city area.

Having this as a backdrop for my early existence posed only two challenges; 1) Not being able to play outside before my siblings arrived home from school; and 2)

Having to wait my turn to participate in activities outside of the home i.e., sports, scouts, Jack and Jill etc., that were common for my brother and sister. Surrounded by love and nurture initially, weekly trips to the library, family vacations both in and out of the country, various other family outings left me believing and feeling as though the world was an oyster waiting for me to reach up and grab it. Of course, there were the normal skirmishes that children encounter, sibling rivalry while vying for positions and status, who got to choose what the family would watch on the color floor model television in the living room after dinner, who broke moms candy dish and the like.

My father and brother, both named Joseph, were my heroes. There was always a feeling of inclusion whenever they were around. Whether working in the yard or attending my brothers little league games, although not able to do much, my presence and minimal contribution was appreciated. Although six years my senior, everything my brother did, I wanted to do. He was intelligent, creative, artistic, and funny. My brother inherited our father's easy-going personality and charm and I wanted to be just like them when I grew up.

When it came to my mother and sister, they were in their own little world. We were able to get along as long as we respected each other's space. When I spent time with my mother and sister, often I felt like a third wheel evoking feelings of anxiety that were overwhelming to the point that I would try to make myself invisible. There appeared to be a shroud of secrecy where my mother and sister were concerned. They would drag me along, in lieu of finding a babysitter. Although I was with them, wherever we were, they conducted conversations that gender precluded me from partaking in. The weather

determined whether I was forced outside or to another part of the house until the secret society completed their conclave.

Cognitive reflection reveals that one of the most profound impacts on my early existence was exposure to family domestic violence. On a family trip to visit my maternal relatives in Pennsylvania, we stopped at my mother's home to visit her father whom we affectionately called Big Dad. Big Dad's brother—inlaw, John, owned a speakeasy attached to the side of his house. Unfortunately, Uncle John got into a fight with his intoxicated grandson, a knife was brandished resulting in a bloody mess. During this altercation my father was in the center attempting to break it up and I was frightened beyond measure.

A time set aside to enjoy family ended up solidifying, in that moment, a proclivity towards non-violence. Absorbed by freight and questions that could not be voiced began an inward journey to find the peace and assurance of a loving family. As a boy between the ages of four and six, how could my questions be teased out when my parents were preoccupied with their own challenges. Although my father immediately removed us from the toxic environment, there was absolutely no conversation. What was witnessed was taboo to discuss which ultimately left more questions than answers. This single incident of family domestic violence created a sense of vulnerability in me while the evil forces of abuse and abandonment were set loose in my life.

Reflecting on the incidents of family violence made me physically ill. As a child, I had asthma, and the familiar feelings of my chest tightening and lungs constricting were attempting to divert my attention from the violence. Not long after witnessing the domestic violence, my parents had to go out of town on church business. My siblings and

me were left in the care of a babysitter that was in her late teens. This sitter took it upon herself to indoctrinate my brother to the world of sex. My sister and I stumbled across them while they were engaged in sexual activity and the sitter said they were playing a game. Well, what child does not want to play games? Thus the abuse began. Several weeks later as we “played” in the house, our mother caught us and proceeded to give us the worst whippings we ever received. Once again, more questions than answers. No discussion. No explanation. No compassion. It felt as if I had become marked and the mark was visible to the world. During the next few years, my introverted, shy personality prevailed as a defense and protection mechanism.

In May 1974, five days before my eighth birthday, my father passed away from a massive heart attack. From that point, things plummeted out of control. It seemed that on the same day, I also lost my mother, brother, and sister. My brother turned to drugs and alcohol to soothe his pain. My sister withdrew to her own world by isolating herself in her room, occupying her time with homework and endless phone conversations. My mother had to enter the work force to make ends meet, which left me to provide for myself while becoming increasingly withdrawn and isolated.

In an attempt to console her loss, my mother sold our home and purchased another house in the suburbs. This action complicated what was already a devastating time; the loss of my family, having to relocate, change schools and make new friends. It was overwhelming. Having tried several jobs, my mother decided, in addition to acquiring a new home in a new neighborhood, that she was more equipped to be an entrepreneur.

Subsequently, the first lady of the church, my mother, purchased a bar of all things. She went from the front pew of the church to the first stool in the bar. This purchase created another challenge called abandonment. My mother spent so much time at the bar that I had to be there in order to see her. Being at the bar thrust me into a world that was previously unheard of. Late nights, smoking, drinking, infidelity, violence, both physical and verbal, became a part of my daily exposure.

Subsequently, I was exposed to a transsexual barmaid. Up to this point I was unaware of what a transsexual was. Yet, with my scarlet letter of previous abuse visible to the world, he/she picked up on my vulnerability and molested me. Going through puberty alone was confusing in and of itself. When the molestation was factored into the equation, questions regarding my sexuality abounded resulting in me becoming a very promiscuous young person who often participated in risky sexual behaviors in order to counter the confusion, thoughts, and feelings that were alive and well within.

The Tragedies

Active critical reflection has revealed several tragedies that have impacted me, not only emotionally, but cognitively and more importantly spiritually. Taken individually, they are more than enough to destroy most. Collectively, they are even more devastating. The tragedies of family domestic violence, and sexual abuse, coupled with the loss of my family due to the death of our father, left me feeling abused and abandoned. These feelings have and are shaping the spiritual person that I am.

Family domestic violence proved significant because it left me identifying with the victims of such violence. As such, the peacekeeping nature of my personality was

honed from an early age, which empowered me to talk my way out of violent situations. This, by no means, prevented the inevitable childhood skirmishes and playground brawls, of which I had more than my share. However, when faced with such situations, because of early exposure, the first course of actions was to seek an amicable solution that did not include physical or emotional violence.

The irony of my early life experiences led me to join the military when I was of age. Specifically, I joined the roughest, toughest branch, which is known for their fighting abilities. Somehow, joining the United States Marine Corps allowed me to confront my fears of physical violence. Spiritually, the exposure to family domestic violence solidified a determination within me to fight for justice, especially concerning the oppressed and disenfranchised.

Physical, sexual abuse in a word is devastating. Having experienced abuse from inside and outside the family caused me to attempt to protect myself by becoming an introvert. When coupled with the loss of my family due to the death of my father, feelings of abandonment prevailed. Much like the exposure to family domestic violence, there were always more questions than answers, however, the ability to voice the questions were taboo. How do you ask questions you cannot verbalize? Who do you ask the questions to when those you are relying on are caught up in their own grief, mourning and chaos and they rarely, if ever, recognize you?

Spiritually, these feelings of abandonment resulted in the cultivation of a prayer life. At the time and unbeknownst to me, in order to find comfort in the midst of abandonment, I found myself turning to and talking with God. These conversations provided comfort and peace along with the strength to endure based upon a future hope

that things would get better. The cognitive and emotional scars are beginning to heal because the wounds are so deep. The abuse and abandonment left me questioning my purpose and sexuality. Only through extensive counseling did I discover that these feelings were normal for a person that had been abused. This realization has proved liberating and invaluable as the quest for healing and recovery is pursued.

Transitional Points

The loss of my father, five days before my eighth birthday, was devastating. Active, critical reflection revealed that when I lost my father, I lost my family as well. Family domestic violence and childhood sexual abuse, with no active parental guidance left me providing for myself at an early age. To combat the questions of my sexuality, I found myself being promiscuous, often participating in risky sexual activities to prove my manhood. The desire to be loved and nurtured resulted in me participating in several relationships that were at best unhealthy.

Even more pressing for me was the desire for limitations and boundaries. As such, I left home at the age of fifteen to move in with my maternal grandfather and uncle. Somehow, I sought to obtain the love, discipline, and guidance that were non-existent in my home of origin. Although beneficial, it proved to be overwhelming and more than what was bargained for. The discipline, love, nurture and guidance that was sought resulted in several confrontations, one which resulted in me being kicked out of the house by my aunt for being disobedient. What I was searching for, I was unable to receive.

Although I only lived with my maternal grandfather and uncle for a year, it was a year of accomplishments. In this year with my maternal grandfather and uncle, I was able

to graduate from high school a year early. This was a blessing and a curse. Although out of high school, I was not mature enough for college nor was I equipped for the world that awaited. Once again, the feelings of abandonment arose as I sought to find my place in a world on my own.

Having attempted a semester in college while working part-time, the quest for maturity and discipline lead me to enlist in the Marine Corps. This proved to be detrimental to an already fragile relationship between my mother and me. My mother sought to prevent my enlistment for personal financial gain while I sought to prove my manhood and independence. Overall, I excelled in the Marine Corps. Many times it appeared as if my scars of abuse and abandonment were visible to my superiors because I was singled out for several of the less than appealing collateral duties. In these moments of isolation and loneliness I found comfort in what was believed to be my soul-mate. We dated for six months and prior to our wedding my brother suddenly passed away. Pending orders overseas and the death of my brother led us to push our wedding up six months. Six weeks after burying my brother, I wedded my then best friend. Ironically, she proved to be just like my mother; selfish, self-centered and manipulative; everything I was seeking to avoid.

Critical reflection reveals that this relationship and wedding was an attempt to compensate for the isolation, loneliness, and abandonment that was wreaking havoc internally. Spiritually, I was searching for acceptance, approval, and understanding. The feelings of emptiness were overwhelming. These empty feelings lead me to accept my call to ministry, which provided comfort and relief. The acceptance of my call to the ministry drew me closer to God and pushed me further away from my spouse. Critical

reflection reveals this to be a significant point of transition because it caused me to begin to rely less on people and more on God; this has been easier said than done.

The birth of my children was also of significant importance to me spiritually. My children's existence has given me purpose and reason; purpose for living, and reason to sacrifice and strive to set an example for them. Like most parents, I seek to give my children the things I feel were lacking in my life. Taking steps to go above and beyond has been my desire to create a nurturing, loving environment for my children in which they can thrive and blossom. In awkward moments, when I sense they are unable to voice their concerns, I assist them through conversation and questioning that enables them to speak what otherwise would go unspoken. Boundaries and limitations have always been voiced and clear.

Conclusion

Life is a culmination of lived experiences. Active, critical reflection reveals the significant lived experiences that shape the individual emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually. When viewed individually, each experience can be overwhelming and destructive. However, when viewed as a whole, they reveal significant moments of growth.

This spiritual autobiography has proven to be one of the most difficult papers I have ever written. Many of the things I sought to bury and deny have surfaced throughout this process. Overall, the process has been liberating; however, to get to this point I have experienced everything from depression, denial, and physical illness. Having run the gamut of thoughts, feelings, and emotions has revealed that in the midst of all of the

tragedies, God's will has been at work in my life. The anointing of God has been upon me, which has allowed and equipped me to function in the midst of chaos and confusion that His will be done.

Having survived the critical, active reflection of my life has illustrated clearly that God has His hands on me and that my life is anointed. In each moment of abuse and abandonment, God has revealed God's presence and anointing by providing the strength to endure. In these moments, God has also revealed that He is preparing me to use my wounds to assist others in finding their healing and recovery. Although painful, this process of critically reflecting over my life and those lived experiences that have impacted me spiritually provides confidence is realizing just how close God has been to me, and to those who suffer similarly. For many years, I considered myself a son, confined to suffer in silence. However, having begun the process of critically reflecting over my life, I realize that I was never alone. Moments of loneliness notwithstanding, I was never alone; lonely perhaps, but never alone. Abused and abandoned but not without. Active reflection, although painful at times, reveals just how close God is and how active He is in our lives.

Contextual Analysis

Contrary to popular belief, ministry does not occur in a vacuum. To the uninitiated, ministry is reserved to the church proper. For many, especially those of the African diaspora, ministry is what takes place in and through the church. Sunday worship, of which the pinnacle is the preaching ministry, is at the helm, followed closely by fundraising dinners, benevolent opportunities such as frequent chicken dinner sales,

nearly new sales of clothing, and the legendary penny donations for memorizing Bible verses in order to help an auxiliary raise their proverbial budget.

Such a shortsighted view is limited, at best. Reverend Dr. Alphonse Allen Jr., the Pastor of Allen Temple AME Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, my pastor, is noted for saying you must understand the context in order to understand the content. Therefore, it is important to understand the context in which ministry occurs in order to appreciate and apply content to that ministry.

Based upon such an elementary perspective, the goal of this paper is to uncover the context, in which I have been called to serve in ministry, thereby uncovering and appreciating the content of such ministry.

Overview of Cincinnati Ohio

Cincinnati, located in southwestern Ohio on the Ohio River, is the third-largest city in the state. Founded in 1788 and incorporated as a city in 1819, it was named after the Society of the Cincinnati, which honored George Washington, whom they likened to the Roman General Cincinnatus. The city saw dramatic growth in the mid 1830s with the development of steamships and the completion of the Ohio and Erie Canal. It soon became a major shipping center, primarily for the pork industry. Cincinnati's location on the Ohio River has contributed not only to its prosperity but also its scenic charm.

Winston Churchill once called Cincinnati "the most beautiful of America's inland cities."¹

Today, Cincinnati has a population of around 340,000 and is home to major corporations that include Procter & Gamble, Kroger, Cinergy Corporation, and Federated

¹ Cincinnati, Ohio, accessed January 31, 2016, <http://www.citytowninfo.com/places/ohio/cincinnati>.

Department Stores, the parent company of Macy and Bloomingdale. Cincinnati ranked thirty-seventh on Ladies Home Journal's 2002 list of the Best Cities For Women (all but one of the cities ranking higher had larger populations). With a metro area that includes parts of Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky, Cincinnati has a unique personality that crosses boarders and creates a Midwestern industrial city with a southern country feel. Sarah Jessica Parker, Nick Lachey and Carmen Electra all hail from Cincinnati. Talk show host Jerry Springer was once its mayor.²

Cincinnati Sports and Leisure

Cultural attractions in Cincinnati include the Contemporary Arts Center, the Cincinnati Art Museum and the American Classical Music Hall of Fame and Museum. An obsolete railroad terminal has been revamped to house two museums: the Museum of Natural History and Science and the Cincinnati Historical Museum. The downtown architecture, with many art deco buildings, is another cultural draw, and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra is one of the oldest orchestras in the country. The city hosts the International Wine Festival each March. On the first Monday in September, the Labor Day Riverfest features fireworks and a festive party scene. Cincinnati's sizeable German population makes its Octoberfest (held, oddly enough, in September) one of the countries largest and most authentic. And any day is a good day for Cincinnati's famous Skyline Chili, served over spaghetti.³

² Cincinnati, Ohio.

³ Cincinnati, Ohio.

Sports are big in Cincinnati. Major league baseball's oldest team, the Cincinnati Reds, play at the 42,000-seat Great American Ballpark downtown on the banks of the Ohio River. The NFL's Cincinnati Bengals play next door at 65,600-seat Paul Brown Stadium. Also in the area is US Bank Arena, which hosts the International Hockey League's Cincinnati Cyclones. The University of Cincinnati and Xavier University have nationally competitive basketball programs that draw a strong local following.⁴

Cincinnati Outdoors

With its riverfront location and a climate that's neither too hot nor too cold, Cincinnati is perfectly situated for recreational activities. The city claims one of the country's top park systems, with more than 100 parks spread over 5,000 acres. Sharon Woods Park is a 750-acre park with a lake surrounded by a 2.6-mile hiking and biking trail, along with restored 19th-century buildings. Shawnee State Park, ninety minutes away in Portsmouth, is a 60,000-acre park in the Appalachian foothills, offering golf, fishing, swimming, boating, several hiking trails, and camping facilities. For golfers, there are more than a dozen courses within the city and dozens more within a small radius. In the winter, skiing is available within an accessible distance. Perfect North Slopes, thirty minutes from the city, has more than a dozen runs on seventy acres. Spicy Run Resort, ninety miles east of Cincinnati in Latham, has trails for all levels and facilities for snowboarders. Mad River Mountain, 130 miles away in Bellefontaine,

⁴ Cincinnati, Ohio.

boasts Ohio's highest skiing elevation (1,460 ft) and has fifteen trails and a snow tubing park on 120 acres.⁵

Cincinnati at Night

Cincinnati has an energetic nightlife, with Main Street the main attraction, especially around the intersection of 12th Street. The Mount Adams neighborhood just east of downtown is a funky area, with upscale restaurants, bars, and clubs. The Corryville district near the University of Cincinnati is another popular area to find diverse evening entertainment options. Riverboat casinos are available in Indiana just twenty minutes away.⁶

Historical Facts

The Roebling Suspension Bridge was the prototype for designer John Roebling's Brooklyn Bridge. At the time of its completion in 1867, it was the longest bridge of its kind in the world spanning 1,067 feet. Porkopolis, one of Cincinnati's most infamous nicknames, dates back to the late 1820's through the mid 1930's when the city was the main processing center for pork in the U.S. Cincinnati was the first city to establish a municipal fire department and fire house. Firefighters have been organized here for over 200 years.⁷

⁵ Cincinnati, Ohio.

⁶ Cincinnati, Ohio.

⁷ Fun Facts About the Queen City, accessed January 31, 2016,

Religion Overview

Of the people in Cincinnati, Ohio, 52.47% are religious, meaning they affiliate with a religion. 26.04% are Catholic; 0.63% are LDS; 6.12% are another Christian faith; 1.35% in Cincinnati, Ohio are Jewish; 0.36% are an eastern faith; 0.22% affiliates with Islam.

| Religion | Cincinnati, Ohio | United States |
|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Percent Religious | 52.47% | 48.78% |
| Catholic | 26.04% | 19.43% |
| LDS | 0.63% | 2.03% |
| Baptist | 6.25% | 9.30% |
| Episcopalian | 1.05% | 0.63% |
| Pentecostal | 2.55% | 1.87% |
| Lutheran | 1.09% | 2.33% |
| Methodist | 4.46% | 3.93% |
| Presbyterian | 2.36% | 1.63% |
| Other Christian | 6.12% | 5.51% |
| Jewish | 1.35% | 0.73% |
| Eastern | 0.36% | 0.53% |
| Islam | 0.22% | 0.84% ⁸ |

⁸ Cincinnati, Ohio, "Religion," accessed January 31, 2016, <http://www.bestplaces.net/religion/city/ohio/cincinnati>.

Background

As a third generation preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) tradition, initially ministry was one of the farthest things from my imagination. As a matter of fact, the pursuit of active ministry was not even on the bucket list of goals and aspirations for myself, especially in light of what I witnessed in my father's ministry. Nonetheless, the Lord had other ideas in store for me.

I accepted the call to ministry early in my first enlistment in the United States Marine Corps during what could be best described as a time of trauma and transition. The trauma was the sudden death of my brother due to cardiac arrest at the age of twenty-five. This trauma was quickly followed by transitions that brought a spark of sunshine to my then overcast life. Six weeks after the sudden death of my brother, I married what I believed to be my soul mate. Within eight weeks of this union, my new bride informed me that we were expecting our first child.

Still reeling from the loss of my brother, in addition to a new union, coupled with the revelation of a new child in route, the calling on my life to serve God was almost unbearable. Relenting to the pressure and accepting the call to serve during this time of transition, adjustment, and acceptance brought a peace that cannot be explained.

Critical reflection revealed that ministry for me was becoming the pastor of a large congregation and seeking to impact the lives of congregants through the charisma the Lord had given me. Little did I know, however, that the Lord was leading me on a journey of discovery that would enable me to meet people where they were while gifting me with the ability to minister to them in such a way that they were validated, allowing me to assist them in meeting their needs.

It is through this lens of personal tragedy and triumph that the context of ministry in which I am privileged to serve began to come into view, with the ultimate goal being that of identifying the intersection in which these lived experiences cross the paths of those I have the potential to minister to in the hope of leading each of us to healing and recovery.

The AME Church

The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) is a denomination that has been hewed from the rock of struggle. Its inception began as a protest to discriminatory behavior exhibited during worship service at St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The audacity of fellow congregants to pull those of the diaspora from their knees during Altar Call led Richard Allen to lead a delegation from the church to discover their own vine and fig tree under which they could worship without threat or worry of interruption.

This initial skirmish with opposition and controversy was just a foretaste of what was to come for the denomination, “But Richard Allen was one of those rare spirits whom opposition could not quell.”⁹ Although there were many rumblings, from within and without, Richard Allen’s God given vision of creating a Free African Society in which they could worship without reservation led him to choose the Methodist tradition espoused by Martin Luther, which was prominent in England. It was under this umbrella they sought to unite.

⁹ George A., Singleton, *The Romance of African Methodism: A Study Of The African Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, NY: Exposition Press, 1952), 16.

In 1816, twenty-nine years after walking out of the St. George's Church in Philadelphia, the Free African Societies from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia gathered in Delaware to formally organize under the banner of African Methodist. The trauma's and tragedies experienced in the preceding twenty-nine years are too numerous to list, however, it is noteworthy to recall that not all of the struggles were brought by external forces. For instance, during this inaugural organizing conference, Daniel Coker was elected and consecrated a Bishop along with Richard Allen. Richard Allen's love for God and vision for the church lead him to initially resign his election because he felt the church, being in its infancy, was not large enough nor did it need two Bishop's. The church agreed with Allen and subsequently elected him unanimously and consecrated him the first Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Many oral historians report that the real argument of this election was due to Coker's fair complexion and as such, he could not accurately reflect the true nature of the African Diaspora.

Now officially formed, the Church of Allen continued to endure many mountain highs and valley lows as it spread and grew. The tenaciousness of Bishop Richard Allen has left a legacy of survival through struggle marked by turning trauma's and tragedies into triumphs through transition. This reality is surmised in the closing declaration of the first book of Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which states:

The African M. E. Church, the child of many trials, was born in a hurricane, and cradled in a storm, in the year of our Lord 1786. It was formally organized in 1816," and like a Divine youth made its way in the world.

Mountain shall sink to plains, And hell in vain oppose; The cause is God's, and must prevail, In spite of all its foes."¹⁰

¹⁰ Singleton, *The Romance of African Methodism*, 24.

Through many pastorates, the seminary and many unnamed self-sabotaging moments, throughout the years, I found myself both within and outside the church. Through these wilderness experiences, I find myself associated with the Allen Temple AME Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. As such, in addition to being an Itinerant Elder within our denomination, I am responsible for the New Members Ministry at Allen Temple. This is a crucial ministry because for many, the first impressions are the lasting ones. Along with the other members of the ministerial staff, I led them in shaping a syllabus for New Members Ministry that highlights the history of the denomination along with the unique qualities that each person brings to the table. What was once was a six-month process has been condensed into three fruitful weeks. As an Itinerant Elder, the pastor calls on me often to provide pastoral care and spiritual support in his absence.

Allen Temple African Methodist Episcopal Church

While serving the local congregation of Allen Temple AME Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, as an assistant to the pastor, I also am privileged to serve the United States Department of Veterans Affairs as a Full-Time Clinical Staff Chaplain assigned to the Trauma and Recovery Center of the Cincinnati VA Medical Center in Fort Thomas Kentucky. As the Staff Chaplain, I serve veterans whom are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injuries (TBI). In addition to these responsibilities, I serve the veterans whom are housed in the domiciliary. The domiciliary is a fifty-eight-bed facility to assist those veterans that are homeless and who wrestle with addictions, such as substance abuse.

In each program, PTSD/TBI and the Domiciliary, I am responsible for conducting initial spiritual assessments along with teaching weekly spirituality classes designed to lead veterans to reconnect to their sense of spirituality in hopes they will use it as a tool to facilitate their healing and recovery.

Conclusion

When I committed to a pursuit of ministry, my goal was to become a pastor of a congregation that would grow to impact not only the congregation, but also the community in which it lived. Unbeknownst to me, God had another plan in mind. God's plan, which is being revealed through active reflection on life's lived experiences, illustrates a God that is with us, and His desire for those called to ministry to do so out of those experiences. As such, I am discovering that the abuse, abandonment, and anointing that have been prevalent throughout my life are the areas of focus that the Lord is seeking to use to His glory for kingdom building here on earth.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a result of an experienced traumatic event. Although conveniently associated with war and its vestiges, the syndrome is the same no matter the root of the traumatic event. In other words, trauma is trauma. It does not matter if the trauma has been experienced in early childhood or a recent event such as a motor vehicle accident. Since trauma is trauma, the event notwithstanding, the result is the same, a traumatized person. Milestones have been reached in this area within the mental health community, which are leading to healing, health, and recovery. However, the church remains conspicuously silent to an epidemic that is silently killing the congregation and community.

The context in which I am privileged to serve, coupled with the unique trauma's experienced throughout my life, have equipped me to give a voice to an otherwise silent epidemic. Critical, active reflection is revealing that the Lord is calling me to give voice to this silent killer and to lead both congregants and veterans to healing and recovery through our shared stories of trauma.

My father and grandfather rose to the position of Presiding Elder within our Zion and served with distinction. Having entered the ministry early in my first enlistment in the United States Marine Corps, I received my Deacon Order's for ministry in 1988 and my Elder's order for ministry in 1992. When I entered the ministry, my goal was to pastor a large and growing congregation that impacted its membership and the community in which it resided.

In 1995, as I pondered discharge from the active military service, I was faced with a dichotomy. In August 1995, I had the opportunity to discharge from active military service and immediately enter into the service of the State Police of Pennsylvania. The ministry prevailed and I decided to relocate my family from Pennsylvania to South Carolina in order to pursue a full-time ministry in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. September 1995 saw me assigned to my first pastoral charge in South Carolina while simultaneously pursuing an undergraduate degree at Allen University in Columbia, South Carolina.

Synergy

For many, life is viewed as polar opposites. The good they seek to do in the midst of a world in which those who have no cares or concerns appear to be doing better and

getting more than those who seek to do the right thing. The other side of this polaris finds those who, at all cost, seek to obtain as much as possible, regardless of those who are injured, maimed, or killed in the process. Much like the Janet Jackson analogy, what have you done for me lately? In other words, I got mine, you get yours.

The dichotomies prevalent with this mode of thinking clearly illustrate a need and desire for those who suffer in silence, to speak up and declare to the masses that we have more in common than we have that separates us. This revelation is only possible as the kingdom of God actively reflects over their lives and realizes that God is calling all of us to a higher level of service within the congregation and community in which we serve.

Active, critical reflection has revealed issues of trauma, pain, and confusion that can be used to the glory of God in kingdom building if I can uncover the strength to surrender to His good and perfect will. In this paper, I seek to illumine where my lived, life experiences intersect with the will of God, ultimately leading to a healing for self and those I have been called to minister to.

The Synergy Connection

Having lived a life of abuse, abandonment, disappointment, and loss has left me longing to be loved and accepted, scars included, for who and what the Lord has created me to be. Active, critical reflection has revealed significant spiritual moments throughout my life in which God was truly and fully present in the midst of my pain and suffering.

The ministry to which I am being called, both within the church as well as in the secular ministry of chaplaincy within the Department of Veterans Affairs is revealing that

once considered losses through abuse and abandonment are the treasures of an Almighty God who seeks to use these events for His glory.

Trauma being trauma, the early exposure to family domestic violence, followed closely by the events of sexual abuse and abandonment following the loss of my father, uniquely qualify me for service to the kingdom of God by bringing my hurts, losses, and pains to the table in order to lead God's children to heal and recover.

As an Itinerant Elder within the African Methodist Episcopal Church, when coupled with the experiences, I have through the ministry of chaplaincy, illumined the areas of trauma, pain, and loss that affect both members within the congregation as well as the veteran's I serve daily. In light of such an illumination, it is clear to me that the Lord is leading me to embrace my pain and to begin to speak to the Veteran's and congregants with a prophetic voice that heals, challenges, and calls to accountability those who are suffering from their own trauma's, losses and disappointments.

Conclusion

I visualize the synergy which the Lord has called me intersecting with the ministry he has already provided my by empowering me, through a prophetic voice to speak to those instances of pain, loss, abuse, and abandonment that have remained silent within the congregation in order that healing and recovery may begin. Within the loss, abuse, and abandonment, God has anointed me to bring healing, restoration and recovery to congregants and veterans by telling the story that has impacted me.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Old Testament

Introduction

Who am I? Why am I here? Does my life matter? What is my purpose? How will I know when I have achieved this purpose? These are a few questions, which are common to all human beings as they seek meaning and purpose in their lives. For many the lived experiences of life shape and give understanding to the meaning and purpose of the individual. However, the quest for discovery of the self is perhaps never more profound than when it is examined through the lens of suffering. Why is this happening to me? Have I done something to deserve this? If God loves me, then where is He? Why would God allow me to experience such pain and loss? Where is God in the midst of my pain and loss?

The journey in discovering the answers to these perplexing questions often leads to an internal examination. If answers are not forthcoming, esteem fades leaving the afflicted believing they have done something to bring about the abuse and exploitation they are experiencing. The prophet Micah suggests another way. The Old Testament preacher suggests that the problem, although felt personally, is very much systemic and the result of an unjust system. Micah says, “He has shown you, O man, what is good. And

what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”¹

An exegesis of Micah 6:1-8 reveals that the result of an unjust government that exploits those who are helpless, is without morals and scruples in their business dealing and turns away from true religion is a community that exacts the same upon its inhabitants. Utilizing historical criticism in the exegesis of this pericope will bear this out. According to Hayes and Holladay, this type of critique allows for the study of the “history in the text” and the “history of the text.”²

The History of the Text

Micah is an eighth century prophet who, like his contemporaries Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea, prophesied to a divided kingdom. He is referred to as a prophet of social justice like Amos. Micah is a Judean from Moresheth (Mi 1:1) “a town some twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem,”³ whose name is translated to mean who is like Yahweh? Micah is the “son of Meribbaal who was the son of Jonathan (1 Chr 23:20; 24:24-25).”⁴ His mother is not identified by name but rather referenced in Judges 17:3 when he returned shekels and confessed to a theft he did not commit out of fear for the curse she had placed upon the thief. Upon the return of the shekels, some 1100, she melted them

¹ Micah 6:8 New International Version. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references will come from the NIV.

² John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner’s Handbook* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1987), 45.

³ Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco 1996), 680.

⁴ Achtemeier, *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, 680.

down “to make a graven image and a molten image, a strange act in light of the Old Testament prohibitions against images and idols.”⁵ Little is known about how he made his livelihood other than vague references that lead the reader to believe he tended flock, a shepherd, and was wealthy because of the type of flock he tended. The wool that was produced by this flock was very expensive.

Micah’s prophecy, like that of Isaiah’s, was directed toward Judah, the southern kingdom, whose capital was Jerusalem, which also housed the Temple of God. Whereas, Amos and Hosea prophesied to the northern kingdom Israel, whose capital was Samaria. Micah prophesied through the reign of three kings Jotham (750-732), Ahaz (736-716), and Hezekiah (716-687).

Prior to the division, Israel and Judah experienced a brief period of unity under the reigns of King David and King Solomon. The kingdoms divided because when Solomon, David’s son died “the northern tribes refused to acknowledge the sovereignty of the king of Jerusalem.”⁶ While Judah was somewhat insulated initially from external influences due to its geographical location along the coastal plains, Israel in the north quickly became subject to pagan rituals and practices that were heavily influencing their surrounding communities such as Samaria.

Of the three kings under whose reign Micah prophesied, Hezekiah is widely believed to be the one who most benefited from his prophecy. As such, Hezekiah was widely considered the best out of the three kings. During Hezekiah’s reign, Samaria had fallen and Assyrian aggression guided by Sennacherib, was strong. Initially Hezekiah was

⁵ Achtemeier, *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, 680.

⁶ Achtemeier, *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, 468.

able to withstand the threats but the pressure grew too strong. Although Isaiah had prophesied the deliverance of Jerusalem and encouraged Hezekiah to hold out “for the Lord will defend this city to save it, (2 Kgs 19:34),”⁷ he caved in and Jerusalem ended up paying dearly. Whereas, this prophecy gave Isaiah credibility, Micah’s prophecies were not met with the same legitimacy. Although Micah had prophesied about the destruction and fall of Samaria and Jerusalem, when God changed God’s mind (2 Kgs 18:9-19:37)⁸ and allowed a remnant from Jerusalem to be rescued, many took Micah’s prophecies to be worthless. Even though his credibility was questioned, to his credit Micah continued to preach and prophesy.

Jotham, another king under whose reign Micah prophesied, was considered a good king because his leadership resulted in the construction of several buildings and was allowed to prosper because “he ordered his ways before the Lord.” (2 Chr 27:4-6; cf. 2 Kgs 15:34)⁹ Jotham’s downfall however, was due the fact he allowed the high places where baal was worshiped to remain, “late in his reign an alliance of Pekah of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and Rezin of Syria threatened Judah with invasion, but Jotham died before the threat could be carried out.”¹⁰ Subsequently his son Ahaz, who succeeded Jotham on the throne, endured not only the threat but the invasion as well.

King Ahaz, Hezekiah’s father, having assumed the reigns following the death of his father Jotham, is considered wicked because of his adoption of “Canaanite practices

⁷ Achtemeier, *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, 421.

⁸ David Alexander and Pat Alexander, *Eerdmans Handbook to the Bible* (Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing, 1983, 449).

⁹ Achtemeier, *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, 548.

¹⁰ Achtemeier, *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, 548.

as sacrificing his son and worshiping at high places (2 Kgs 16:1-4).¹¹ He even went as far as to “replace the Lord’s altar in the Jerusalem Temple with one molded after an altar in Damascus (2 Kgs 16:10-16).”¹² Although Samaria, the capital of Israel had fallen to Assyrian aggression, the Kings of Syria and Israel had joined forces and sought the help of King Ahaz to thwart the aggression to no avail. Instead, King Ahaz turned to the King of Assyria, Tiglath-pileser, by seeking his protection from King’s Pekah and Rezin.

The History in the Text

It is into this eighth century mess that God calls Micah of Moresheth to prophecy to Judah in hopes of getting them to remember from whence they have come and who delivered them. Micah’s prophecy begins with pronouncements of doom followed by pronouncements of salvation. Thus the two major themes that run through the prophecy are destruction and salvation. It appears as if God is giving them if/then statements while simultaneously reminding them of the salvation that is at hand. If you continue to exploit the poor, stealing their land and taking advantage of them, then you will be destroyed. If justice is allowed to be bought and sold for a price, then you will be destroyed. If you continue to deal immorally in conducting business, then you will be destroyed. If the preachers continue to embrace pagan rituals and customs, failing to challenge the people to change their lives and only saying what they want to hear, then you will be destroyed. Immediately following the superscription, Micah delivers this prophecy for both Judah and Samaria, which carries on through chapter 3. In chapter 4 Micah begins to share the

¹¹ Achtemeier, *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, 19.

¹² Achtemeier, *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, 19.

vision of a new day in “which God’s word goes out to all men, and to which nations flock, in an era of peace and prosperity.”¹³ Following a brief but stern reminder of God’s judgments, Micah moves into chapter 6 to remind Judah of a “deliverer—the ultimate deliverer—who would come, like David, from Bethlehem.”¹⁴

Chapter 6, from which our pericope is chosen, ushers in a court motif in which God is both the prosecutor and judge. Court, having been called into session finds God, the prosecutor, asking Judah in essence what have I done. And why do you not remember? “My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me.”¹⁵ Then God reminds them of his divine presence and deliverance from Moses to the Promised Land. Micah’s prophecy reveals God challenging Judah to make its case plain and to lay forth the charges they have against him.

The people’s response, if not so overwhelmingly sad, would be amusing. The defendants have the unmitigated gall to suggest, imply, and infer that their understanding of what God desires is unclear. In other words, they are trying to say that they do not know any better so they choose to do nothing. Or even more ridiculous, they imply it was easier to adopt rituals and customs from outside influences, go long to get along, because they did not know what God required. The reality however, was they forgot. Our pericope (6:8) finds God undermining their lame excuse and proving how lax their memory was. God says how can you make such an absurd claim? I have already showed you what is

¹³ Alexander, *Eerdman’s Handbook to the Bible*, 450.

¹⁴ Alexander, *Eerdman’s Handbook to the Bible*, 450.

¹⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, New International Version (NIV)* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), 1382.

required. “He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God”(6:8).¹⁶

Micah concludes his prophecy with God, the judge, asking the people, in a taunting and jeering manner, what do you want me to do? Should I forget the abuse and exploitation? Should I turn a blind eye to the cheaters, liars, and manipulators? The Lord proceeds to pronounce judgment upon them for their sins. “Therefore, I have begun to destroy you, to ruin you because of your sins”(6:13).¹⁷ Once again, the people’s response is poor, at best. In reality, it is tantamount to them crying poor mouth. Our hands are tied and there is nothing we can do. We are helpless. However, God could not leave them in this lowly state. The Lord has Micah conclude his prophecy by reminding the people that restoration is coming. A day when there will be equity, peace, and prosperity for all and not just a select few.

Exegesis

The various versions of the text vary slightly and are easily overlooked. Whereas the NIV presents the challenge passively, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the King James Version (KJV), and the New American Standard (NAS) record it actively; to act justly (NIV) is enhanced “to do” in the NRSV, KJV and NAS. Justly and justice are interchanged depending on the version. Justice in this pericope is not meant in a legalistic form. Rather it has to do with relationships and the interaction one has with God and his fellow human beings. Grant, in his work entitled the **Micah Mandate**, states that when

¹⁶ Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, 1383.

¹⁷ Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, 1383.

justice is limited to its legalistic form undermines and makes void the work of the cross because it shifts God's rule to humanity's limited understanding and ability to judge. "Legalism abolishes the significance of the cross. It makes light of Christ's sacrifice. It nullifies the work of the Holy Spirit. It abrogates the necessity of grace."¹⁸

Justice, as used by Micah and his fellow eighth century prophets, was a call to remember and to return to the Mosaic Covenant (Ex 20:1-17) God gave on Mt Sinai. In carrying out justice according to the covenant leads to faithful adherence to God's word and ushers in right relationship and fellowship with both God and humanity.

Mercy, the second requirement found in our pericope, is an attribute of God's character. The Hebrew word used, hesed, is transliterated to mean loving-kindness, or steadfast love. Of the versions studied, the NIV and KJV use mercy while the NRSV and NAS utilize kindness. "In the Old Testament mercy/loving-kindness is associated with the covenant obligation between God and humans. Humans must be faithful to the covenant and God binds himself to fidelity to the covenant by mercy and by grace."¹⁹

The conclusion of the Yahwistic challenge found in Micah 6:8 "and to walk humbly with your God," is similar in all versions queried except the KJV which uses "thy" in place of "your." Syntax notwithstanding, the relational theme that is inherent in this pericope is carried out in each mandate. Its nature is both personal and corporate.

¹⁸ George Grant, *The Micah Mandate* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), 71.

¹⁹ Achtemeier, *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, 674.

Conclusion

The above exegeted pericope, Micah 6:1-8, clearly provides hope for the marginalized, the abused, the manipulated, the dispossessed, the disenfranchised and what noted Theologian Howard Thurman calls the disinherited.²⁰ In his prophecy, Micah makes clear for the reader the fact that abuse, in any form, is the result of an inherent, systemic, and unjust system, which begins in the government of the people. This corrupt system of governing gives license to class systems, i.e., classism, sexism, and racism that lead to cancers such as physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. As the government is unjust in dealing with its citizens, then it's only a matter of time before its citizens begin to adopt similar practices to be implemented in the local community.

Micah's call to the Southern Kingdom, Judah, is as true for us today as it was when initially delivered. The world in which we live today is marred by the exploitation of the poor, unsavory business dealings along with a short memory of our protection and deliverance. The gulf between the haves and have not's grows exponentially daily. The poor and disinherited are exploited daily. No one is in a right relationship with their neighbor and preachers are pimping prophesies to the highest bidder. We, like Judah in the days of Micah, have forgotten from whence we have come. We have forgotten who provided for and delivered us. We have forgotten the Yahwistic faith of our forefathers; instead turning to that which makes us feel good but does not cause us to change our lives.

Micah's prophesy is a call to remembrance coupled with the challenge to return to the one who has kept us and continues to keep us, even when we do not want to be kept. In the midst of your pain and suffering remember who delivered you, remember who lead

²⁰ Thurman Howard, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976).

you, remember who kept you, and remember who provided for you. For if you remember these things, then there is no way you can spiritually and consciously abuse, mistreat, exploit or disinherit your sisters and brothers. The hope is in remembering. Remember!

New Testament

Introduction

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in the town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t wear me out with her coming!” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Lk 18: 1-8 NIV).

Luke gives the reader a practical application of the prophetic and profound mandate found in Micah 6:8 “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”²¹

Utilizing the method of historical criticism in the exegesis of this text will reveal both the “history in the text and the history of the text.”²² The purpose is to provide the reader and hearer with the assurance that God is at work, through prayer, in the active, daily affairs of the world. In addition, it is meant to give hope to those who have been

²¹ Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, 1383.

²² John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner’s Handbook*, Revised Edition (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1987), 45.

abused, marginalized, disenfranchised, dispossessed, disinherited and otherwise systemically denied relief at the hands of an unjust system that appears to reward the wealthy at the expense of the poor.

Passage Exegesis

The teaching about the coming of the Son of man (cf. 18:8) is concluded with a parable about prayer. As it stands, the purpose of the parable is said to be that of encouraging the disciples to pray until the parousia and not give up hope (18:1); an interval before the parousia is presupposed, as is clear from 17:22–37. The parable proper concerns a widow who at first fails to get a judge to take up her case, no doubt out of deference to a wealthy opponent and his bribes. Weak though she is, she gains her end by persistence. The application is similar to that in 11:5–8. But the parable has a further point. In the application made in vs. 6–8 the point made *a peiore ad melius* is that God too will certainly vindicate his elect people in the end. He will act speedily (or suddenly): but the decisive question is whether they will continue faithful (and therefore prayerful) right through until the Parousia of the Son of man.²³

The exegesis below supports the interpretation of verse 1 given in the above summary, and shows that Luke has not wrongly generalized the message of an eschatological parable into a comment on the need for persistent, importunate prayer. Indeed, there is more to be said for the suggestion that a parable about prayer in general has been turned into a parable about the need to be ready for the coming of the Son of man. Acceptance of this view depends upon the view taken of verses 6–8. These verses

²³ Marshall I. Howard, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter, NH: Paternoster Press, 1978).

offer an interpretation of the parable. Taken on its own, the parable could be regarded as a companion to the parable of the friend at midnight (11:5–8), and giving teaching on the need for importunity in prayer (cf. Ott, 19–72). Then vs. 6–8 are an addition or series of additions in which the parable is turned into a lesson about the character of God (vs. 6–8a, or 6b–7), and finally applied to the disciples (v. 8b). Most commentators regard 8b as an addition to the parable, probably by Luke.²⁴

The language of verses 6b–7 is not Lucan, and the Aramaising construction is proof of its age. Delling has listed the differences in construction between this parable and 11:5–8, which show that neither should be interpreted narrowly in the light of the other, e.g. by removing the eschatological features here. As it stands, the parable requires an application, and since the judge is the principal character, the application is appropriate; the point of the parable is the contrast between the judge and God. As for the Lucan style of verse 6a, this proves nothing more than that Luke has edited at this point. There is greater difficulty with verse 8b, which reverts to the attitude of the disciples. But the saying in itself is unexceptionable as teaching of Jesus, and it is not necessarily Lucan. In fact, we have a structure similar to that in the parable of the prodigal son, where a story, whose central character appears to be the father and whose central concern is to depict the character of God, turns out to have a ‘sting in the tail’ as it presents the picture of the elder brother and asks the audience whether they behave like him. So here, after depicting the character of God, the parable turns in application to the disciples and asks whether they will show a faith as persistent as the nagging of the widow. Since these two factors, the attitude of the judge and the attitude of the woman, are tightly woven into the parable, it is probable that the double application is also original; certainly it flows perfectly

²⁴ Howard, *The Gospel of Luke*.

naturally from the parable itself. It seems unnecessary, therefore, to suppose that verses 6–8 are a later addition. As for verse 1, this is a Lucan introduction which links up closely with verse 8b. It stresses the fact that there may be an interval before the parousia (cf. 19:11), but does not distort the teaching of the parable.²⁵

Delling suggests that the parable was originally addressed by Jesus to a group of pious Jews who were waiting impatiently for the Son of man to vindicate them against their opponents. This reconstruction is quite conjectural, since we have no evidence for the existence of such a group. Rather, the parable presupposes the same persecution for disciples as is found elsewhere in the teaching of Jesus. The parable is from Luke's special source material, and Luke has used verse 1 to link it to Q's material.

- 1) The introductory statement shows features of Lucan style, and has at least been edited by him. But the use here is not so much to express purpose (in which case the δεῖν would be unnecessary), as rather reference (compare the use of πρὸς αὐτούς, 20:19.). πάντοτε (15:31) is generally understood to refer to continuous prayer (cf. 1 Thes 5:17). Jewish teaching in general rejected the idea of perpetual prayer, although there were exceptions (SB II, 237f; I, 1036). But the thought here is of continual prayer, rather than continuous prayer. The fear is that men will give up before they are answered.
- 2) The parable is about a judge (11:19; 12:14, 58) apparently in a small town where local people of prominence were appointed to act as required; there does not appear to have been a uniform, organized system. The corruption of the judge is indicated by his double characterization as one who neither feared God nor had regard for men.
- 3) The other character in the story is a widow who is the typically needy and helpless person. She came repeatedly (ῆρχετο) to the judge with a request that he would take up her case. ἐκδικέω, 'to avenge', can mean 'to procure justice for someone' (Rom 12:19), in the sense of securing the rights of the wronged person (e.g. the payment of compensation) or of punishing the offender.
- 4) For a long time (ἐπὶ χρόνον; cf. 4:25) her pleas were in vain. Although the judge was legally required to give precedence to a widow's case or he would not dare (θέλω, 18:13; Mk 6:26; Jn 7:1) to withstand her powerful opponent. Finally, he gave in.

²⁵ Howard, *The Gospel of Luke*.

- 5) The use of διά γε is also found in 11:8, and the thought of causing trouble for someone also appears in the earlier parable (κόπος, 11:7). ταύτην could be derogatory (15:30), but not necessarily so. The judge is now willing to see that the widow receives justice because of the consequences to himself if he fails to take her side. He fears that she may keep on coming (έρχόμενος, present participle, as in 13:14; 16:21; but a single coming could be meant, as in 15:25). ὑπωπιάζω means literally ‘to strike under the eye’, i.e. ‘to give a black eye to’.
- 6) The parable in itself contains no application, but now an application follows. It is odd, however, that the flow of words is interrupted. εἰπεν δέ is common in Luke and ὁ κύριος may be Lucan (Ott, 34–40) or pre-Lucan. The insertion signals the change from parable to application and underlines the solemn utterance about the character of God drawn by Jesus.
- 7) With the mention of God’s name the application moves to a description of his character comparable to that in Sir. 35:12–20, the language of which is reflected here. The οὐ μή construction is used to give a strong question expecting an emphatic answer, ‘Yes’ (Jn 18:11; Rev 15:4; BD 365). ποιέω τὴν ἐκδίκησιν means ‘to vindicate’, in the sense of punishing offenders and or of rescuing those who are in trouble.
- 8) Jesus answers his own question authoritatively with a λέγω ὑμῖν construction, which is probably pre-Lucan. God will act on behalf of the elect ἐν τάχει. This phrase can mean ‘soon’ or perhaps ‘suddenly, unexpectedly.’ In the Old Testament passages cited the phrase can refer to something which happens after a very short interval, i.e. ‘soon’, or which happens in a very short space of time, i.e. ‘quickly’, or which happens before men are ready for it and when they do not expect it.²⁶

God as Friend

According to the diegetic narrator, Jesus tells this parable to encourage his disciples “to pray always and not to become discouraged or be afraid (μή ἐγκακειν)” (v. 1). Jesus begins by introducing a setting (a certain city) and two characters: a judge who has “neither reverence for God nor respect for people” and a widow (v. 2). As part of Jesus’ durative summary, we also learn that for some time (ηρχετο προς αὐτον) the widow has been petitioning the judge for justice against an opponent but that he has repeatedly

²⁶ Howard, *The Gospel of Luke*.

refused ($\eta\theta\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\nu\ \epsilon\pi\iota\ \chi\rho\omega\nu$). Jesus concise summation presents readers with several unknowns. For instance, he does not indicate: 1) the nature of the accusation; 2) whether we are to envision their exchanges in the context of a Jewish or Roman court; 3) why, in a world inhabited exclusively by males, she has no male relative or friend to represent her; 4) whether she is asking that her adversary fulfill a particular obligation or be punished appropriately or 5) whether the judge repeatedly declines to administer a just verdict or simply refuses to hear her case.²⁷ Although readers are left to puzzle over many of the scenarios specifics, a few aspects do seem clear. For instance, Jesus' portrait of the judge appears to draw on a familiar tradition and to accurately evoke a corrupt judicial system in which the highest bribe often purchased a favorable verdict. Furthermore, it appears that the widow deviates from customary etiquette by refusing to preface her demand with an honorific title. Wendy Cotter writes: "It is a curt command devoid of any title of respect for the magistrate. Yet if one examines the legal papyri of the time, all communications with the magistrates are polite and some are very differential, all using some form of respectful address."²⁸ The widow shows no regard for common social conventions; she is preoccupied entirely with securing justice. To some degree, she therefore exhibits the kind of reckless impudence Jesus suggested would help the petitioner in 11:5-7 acquire his loaves.²⁹

Following a description of an ongoing state of affairs of unspecified duration (2-4a), the parable decelerates rapidly and shifts to singulative narration (4b-5). Readers are

²⁷ J. A. Metzger, "God as Friend? Reading Luke 11:5-13 & 18:1-18 with a Hermeneutic of Suffering," *Horizons In Biblical Theology* 32, no. 1: 33-57. *New Testament Abstracts*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 13, 2016).

²⁸ Metzger, "God as Friend? Reading Luke 11:5-13 & 18:1-18."

²⁹ Metzger, "God as Friend? Reading Luke 11:5-13 & 18:1-18."

now asked to focus on a much more narrowly defined span of time during which the judge finally surrenders and decides to grant the widow's request. The judges internal ruminations, which readers may trust as a reliable source of information, both confirm the intradiegetic narrators initial characterization of him (v. 2) and furnish two rationales for why he eventually concedes: 1) she continues to cause trouble for him; and 2) he fears she might ruin his reputation (v. 5). The preponderance of present tense verbs and participles in the judge's internal monologue convey just how tenacious and indefatigable the widow is. Not only has she proven to be an enduring source of trouble (*παρέχειν μοι κόπον την χήραν ταύτην*), should he not grant her a favorable verdict, the judge believes that she will continue coming (*εἰς τέλος” ἔρχομένη*) and *persist* in defaming him (*ύπωπιάζη*). The parable concludes with the judge's resolution; the final outcome of their exchanges is not narrated. However, as in the Parable of the Reticent Friend, readers are led to believe that the petitioner will achieve her objective, but not because of the benevolence or goodwill of the petitionee. The judge, whom Jesus subsequently labels "unjust" (v 6), will respond not out of concern for justice or the widow's wellbeing but only because of her unflagging will.³⁰

Following the scenario in 11:5-7, Jesus drew attention to a quality by which the petitioner might obtain his objective (*ἀναιδεια*; v. 8), but here he immediately shifts the readers' focus to the internal ruminations of the judge: "Listen to what the unjust judge is saying" (v. 6). Jesus then poses a rhetorical question from which he expects an affirmative response: "Shall God never (οὐ μή) grant justice to his elect who cry out to him day and night?" (v. 7a). As with 11:5-8, the parabler applies an allegorical

³⁰ Metzger, "God as Friend? Reading Luke 11:5-13 & 18:1-18."

interpretation: the unjust judge, who grants justice reluctantly and only because of the petitioner's importunity, represents God while the widow stands for persons who "cry out... day and night" in prayer. Jesus once again acknowledges a negative experience of the deity among some of Roman Palestine's "poor... captives... blind... [and] oppressed" (4:18-19): God, like the unjust judge, has "no respect for people" (*οὐδέ ἀνθρώποιν ἐντρέπομαι*; v. 4); he is deaf to the cries of the suffering and oppressed and generally unconcerned with humanity's wellbeing (Jb 19:7; 24:12;).

Even if he should hear their requests, they have little reason to believe he will weigh their cases fairly, for just as the judge proceeds as if accountable to no higher authority or moral law (*τὸν θεόν οὐ φοβούματι* v. 4), so is God accountable to no one. However, argues Jesus, even if God is as these persons experience him, it stands to reason that if one persists in advancing his or her demands, s/he will eventually receive a hearing and a response (v. 7a). For Jesus, it is simply inconceivable that the deity would *never* grant justice to those who suffer. In the earthly sphere, dogged importunity is very often able to achieve its objective; there is good reason to believe that such tenacity will work in the heavenly sphere as well.³¹

Significantly, Jesus neither condemns those who maintain a negative image of God nor asks them to align it with more traditional portrayals. Nevertheless, as in 11:5-13, he does offer his own conception of God, but only at the end of the discourse. First, Jesus states that God "shows forbearance (*μακροθυμώ*) toward [his elect]" (v. 7b), even those whose passionate cries threaten defamation, verbally abuse, or push well beyond acceptable limits of decency. After all, even Job, who repeatedly made clear his experience of God as an aggressive, ruthless malefactor (Jb 10:8-22) as well as

³¹ Metzger, "God as F(r)iend? Reading Luke 11:5-13 & 18:1-18."

ignoring the cries of the oppressed (19:7; 24:12), not only received a reply “out of the whirlwind” but also was commended by God as having spoken “what is right.” Thus, one need not fear the consequences of “crying out to [God] day and night” (v. 7), of brazen, forthright, even accusatory speech.³²

Second, Jesus implies that the deity is neither inattentive nor unjust but eager to grant justice: “I tell you that [God] will grant justice to them soon” (v. 8a). Curiously, this affirmation of the deity’s goodness and justice is punctuated with a rhetorical question that may undermine the confidence Jesus hoped to instill: “However, when the Son of Humanity comes, will he find faith on earth?” (v. 8b). Responsibility for the emergence of justice is suddenly shifted from God to auditors. Readers, initially confident of their inclusion among God’s “elect” and his eagerness to grant justice (7-8a) may begin to doubt if they will see it at all since its arrival now appears to depend upon their “faith” (v. 8b). One may wonder: Why should faith be a prerequisite for the receipt of justice? Should injustices not be remedied (as best they can) and reparations be administered regardless of whether faith is present? Jesus’ concluding question is particularly unsettling since a negative response is anticipated. As in 11:5-13, then, Jesus’ attempt to persuade auditors of God’s goodness and faithfulness toward “the elect” may not prove effective, for, when one reaches the end of the discourse, speedy execution of justice for those who “cry out to [God] day and night” is now far from certain.³³

³² Metzger, “God as F(r)iend? Reading Luke 11:5-13 & 18:1-18.”

³³ Metzger, “God as F(r)iend? Reading Luke 11:5-13 & 18:1-18.”

A Godly Widow Persistently Pursuing Justice

The parable of the widow and the judge in Luke 18:1-8 is unique to Luke. It paints a vivid picture of two colorful characters that tell us something about the realm of God. But there is no consensus about precisely what it tells us. A sampling of titles given to it is telling. Is it "The Parable of the Unjust Judge"? Or is it "The Parable of the Persistent Widow"? While there is, of course, no title on the parable in the Greek text, most translators and commentators supply one. The majority focuses on the judge, labeling him either unjust, dishonest, or unrighteous. Some give it a title that keeps both characters in view: "The Parable of the Widow and the Judge." Some recognize both the widow and the judge, but give one the primary attention, such as C. F. Evans, who titles it "The Parable of the Unjust Judge (Importunate Widow)." Is it about how "You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down"? Or is it about persistence in prayer? Is it meant to be paired with the parable of the Pharisee and the toll collector (Lk 18: 9-17) so that it is about constancy and humility in prayer?³⁴

Is it a comic parable meant to make us laugh at the ludicrous picture of a powerful judge cowering before a helpless old widow? Or is it a deadly serious portrait of one small victory for justice in the face of shameless systems of rampant injustice? What makes the judge finally give in? Is it fear that the widow will do him physical violence, as the literal meaning of ὑπωπτάζῃ (v. 5) implies? Or is it fear that she will publicly unmask his system of kickbacks and bribe taking by not making use of the usual way of trying to make accommodations behind the scenes? Or is the judge just sick and tired of this widow and he gives her what she wants so he can get her out of his hair? Jeremías would

³⁴ B. E. Reid, "A Godly Widow Persistently Pursuing Justice: Luke 18:1-8," *Biblical Research* 45, 25-33, *New Testament Abstracts*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 13, 2016).

have us imagine a beleaguered man who "is tired of her perpetual nagging and wants to be left in peace." And, finally, what were the hearers of this parable supposed to hear? What in this story is a disciple of Jesus supposed to emulate?³⁵

It is important to recognize Luke's concern to tame this story of an unconventional woman and cast her in a docile and acceptable role as an example of praying always, much like Anna, of Luke 2:36-38, who spent eighty-tour years praying in the temple. This parable of the widow and the judge is one more example of the mixed message that the Third Evangelist gives about women in the Christian community. As feminist scholars have argued elsewhere, although Luke preserves the most stories with female characters, for the most part they are given silent, passive roles. Luke's redaction of this parable and the translations and interpretations of subsequent scholars have, for the most part, tamed, and even trivialized, a powerful portrait of a Godly widow persistently pursuing justice.³⁶

The liberating potential in interpreting this parable, as that of the godly widow engaged in the persistent pursuit of justice is evident. It recovers a crucial biblical presentation of God in a female image. It provides us with an effective example of nonviolent confrontation in the pursuit of justice and underscores the paradoxical power of seeming weakness. This parable gives courage to those who would blow the whistle on systems where bribery and behind the scenes deal-making reign. This unsettling story can help confront and shatter sexism and other stereotypes that distort the truth. And when

³⁵ Reid, "A Godly Widow Persistently Pursuing Justice."

³⁶ Reid, "A Godly Widow Persistently Pursuing Justice."

Christians become weary in their repeated efforts toward justice, the widow encourages unflagging efforts until the goal is accomplished. Further, she encourages those who would be intimidated at the enormity of the challenge in the face of their puny efforts. Finally, this widow keeps a disciple realistic about not expecting to transform whole systems of injustice at once. The judge remained as ungodly and as shameless as ever—but she achieves one small victory for justice.³⁷

Perhaps a more fitting conclusion for this parable would be not Luke's convoluted efforts found in verses 6-8, but one more like the conclusion to the parable of the lost coin. Like the woman whose joy overflows in partying with her friends and neighbors at the finding of her lost coin (15:9), a celebration to conclude this one widow's victory could underscore the good news this parable presents and give strength and freedom of spirit to its hearers for their next confrontation with injustice.³⁸

Luke and Suffering

Whereas the Spirit has been associated with prophecy, sanctification, the Kingdom, or a wider agenda in Luke-Acts, the relationship with suffering has been insubstantially identified. Into this lacuna Mittelstadt has stepped and provided a useful introduction to and analysis of the purposes of the Spirit in the context of suffering as it relates to Luke-Acts. As a result of a further examination of the relationship between the Spirit and suffering in Luke-Acts, it will be possible to recognize that Luke instructs his readers who live in contexts of suffering and, for some, persecution, that support is

³⁷ Reid, "A Godly Widow Persistently Pursuing Justice."

³⁸ Reid, "A Godly Widow Persistently Pursuing Justice."

available from the Spirit while their destinies are charted by the Spirit. In his gospel, Luke identifies opposition throughout the life of Jesus who ministered in association with the Spirit. In his second volume, he traces the same consequence of Spirit-inspired ministry receiving acceptance but also opposition. In Luke, Jesus suffers; in Acts, his followers suffer. The presence of the Spirit with Jesus in Luke does not result in an absence of suffering; similarly, the presence of the Spirit with believers does not signal a paucity of suffering for them either. As the Son of Man who was partnered by the Spirit suffered (Lk 9:22), so will his followers (Acts 9:16).³⁹

The association between suffering and the Spirit is located in the Old Testament. The Spirit is presented as empowering people to be leaders in contexts where people are suffering (Nm 27:18; Jgs 3:10; Is 63:11-14) while in times of weakness, the Spirit sustains people and sometimes facilitates their deliverance. The Spirits companionship in suffering is identified by Hoek as evidence of his “thereness” (Ps 51:11; 139:7; Ez 37:14; 39:29). As a consequence of his divine presence, the Spirit is expected to bring comfort, sustenance and power, best expressed in the *Ascension of Isaiah* 5:14-15 where the writer describes the death of Isaiah in which he “did not cry out, or weep, but his mouth spoke with the Holy Spirit when he was sawn in half.” The role of the Spirit in the context of suffering is also identified with regard to the mission of the Messiah, though here again few have commented on this aspect of the work of the Spirit, preferring to identify empowering, initiatory, affirming, prophetic or proclaimatory motifs. However, notwithstanding the value of the above emphases, the Old Testament identifies the Spirits

³⁹ K. Warrington, 2009, "Suffering and the Spirit in Luke-Acts," *Journal Of Biblical And Pneumatological Research* 1, 15-32. *New Testament Abstracts*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 13, 2016).

impact on the Messiah with regard to providing hope, justice and salvation for those who are suffering (Is 11:4; 42:2-3; 61:1-3).⁴⁰

The Spirit Is Involved In Judgment

Following the reference to the baptism in the Holy Spirit, Luke provides the adjunctive and perhaps interpretive definition of (the Spirit of) fire as that which cleanses and refines (3:9, 17-18), a concept to be gleaned also from Isaiah 4:4, a verse contextualized in the issue of divine judgment. Although the Spirit is associated with joy (Lk 10:21), he is also associated with judgment; while Jesus is presented as rejoicing with the Spirit in the mission achieved thus far, the basis of that mission is judgment. Whether the motif of fire relates to believers, unbelievers, or both, people will suffer because of the Spirit. He burns.⁴¹

The Spirit Inspires Those Who Will Suffer (1:15; 4:1-2, 15-19)

These two references to the role of the Spirit are unique to Luke. In 1:15, an angel informs Zechariah that his son, John, will be filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. 1:42-45). More significantly for this exploration of the association of the Spirit and suffering is the reference to the life that John was to live after and as a result of the Spirit's involvement. His was to be a life of simplicity, dedication, and sacrifice (1:15), focused on being a messenger (3:4), to be superseded by Jesus (3:16), living in the wilderness (3:2) and preaching a message of repentance and water baptism (3:3) and judgment to the Jews (3:

⁴⁰ Warrington, "Suffering and the Spirit in Luke-Acts."

⁴¹ Warrington, "Suffering and the Spirit in Luke-Acts."

7-10). His was to be a ministry that was to result in misunderstanding by others about him (9:7-9), rejection, (7:33) and uncertainty, as he wondered about Jesus and his own mission (7:18-20). His short mission was to end in arrest (3:19-20) and execution (9:9) and he was to die, unaware of the forthcoming success of the one he preceded. Although his role was uniquely important and affirmed as such by the Spirit (1:67-79), the course of his life was to be challenging as he engaged in aspects of suffering on a number of different levels, specifically as a result of the mission that the Spirit had given to him. He achieved the Spirit-objective in a context of authentic commitment to it but this single-minded integrity was to be associated with adversity. The Spirit who affected the triumph of his task drew him to his destiny through a sea of suffering (4:1-2).⁴²

In 4:15-19, Luke carefully records a summary of the sermon preached by Jesus in Nazareth in the power of the Spirit at the commencement of his ministry. As such, it further identifies “the pattern of acceptance and rejection,” In the sermon; Jesus declares good news and identifies himself as the one who will bring it about (4:24). The significance of the reference to the Spirit is to demonstrate that Jesus is not functioning with a human agenda. He is commencing his public ministry in association with the Spirit. His is a Spirit-agenda. Luke presents Jesus as operating in the context or sphere of the Spirit, with the power of the Spirit available to him to use at his prerogative. The message inspired by the Spirit is good news for those who need it most—the poor, the captives or prisoners of war, the blind and the oppressed. The Spirit of power (4:14) affirms and enables Jesus to fulfill these objectives. He is the stronger one (3:16) who can effect these changes for the Spirit dedicates himself to companionship with Jesus. But as with John, his mission, so carefully delineated by Luke (4:18-19), does not meet with

⁴² Warrington, "Suffering and the Spirit in Luke-Acts."

long-term affirmation. Although there is initial appreciation (4:22), it soon turns into anger, outright rebuttal, and physical expulsion from the synagogue and the city, culminating in an attempt to murder him (4:28-29).⁴³

Luke has crafted his narrative and its setting in his account carefully. After the remarkable and self affirming events of the Jordan event for Jesus (3:21-22), Luke identifies the genealogical pedigree of Jesus (3:23-38), followed by the skirmish with the devil in the wilderness (4:1-13) that results in Jesus dismissing him and reminding him that he is no mere mortal to be tested; he is, after all, the Lord and his God (4:12). Thereafter, he enters his own hometown with the Spirit and is welcomed by all (4:14-15). The long awaited mission is about to commence and thus far, it appears that success and acclaim will be normative, all the more so when the Old Testament is revealed as providing support for Jesus, especially in the person of Isaiah (4:19; Is 61:1-2), arguably the greatest Jewish prophet, and Elijah and Elisha are associated with him (4:25-27), both of whom were highly honored in Judaism. Thereafter, Luke will record that Jesus fulfilled these commissions (4:31-43). The positive start anticipated is highlighted further by the fact that the quotation, mainly from Isaiah 61:1-2, omits the statement “and the day of vengeance of our God” that concludes the Isaianic passage. This is a comprehensive package of good news with nothing negative to spoil its content.⁴⁴

⁴³ Warrington, "Suffering and the Spirit in Luke-Acts."

⁴⁴ Warrington, "Suffering and the Spirit in Luke-Acts."

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

When one seeks to analyze the news industry, especially the electronic media, one comes across many stories of crimes—some of them horrific. News executives believe that stories of shock rooted in criminal violent behavior draws ratings. So there seems to be competition as to which network can produce and show the most horrific acts. This sentiment is not only operative in the news industry of television but also in the programming of shows in the many network channels.

Notwithstanding the many aptly named reality television shows, networks seem to have a factory that constantly produces shows which center on criminal activity. From NCIS, Law and Order, Criminal Minds, How to Commit Murder, and other television shows too numerous to name. The shows center many times on the intricate ways of the criminal mind, the crime itself, the unrelenting efforts in some cases, of the police work including its usage of technology and forensic science. Then one sees the carefully staged courtroom scene. What is often minimized or overlooked is the pain and agony visited upon the victims. The one word that best describes all that is visited upon these victims is trauma.

In many ways art imitates life; in fact, many if not most of the crime programs, are rooted in real life experiences: true stories. In every family there are individuals with

stories of violence visited upon them. Not all, but most of these persons are women. Some of the persons are battered; entailing in what is described as domestic violence; some are sexually assaulted. Then there are the children who grow up in environments where they are physically and sexually abused. And to a large extent, many do not receive the needed medical attention, which includes therapy.

From a real and practical sense, while sadness and trauma is addressed on television, practically nothing is said about trauma in the church. It seems as if only the local and state government and non-profit groups address the issue of trauma and its treatment. And so, as a minister and trained Chaplain, I have gleaned insight into the subject of trauma. There is an internal passion for me to bring the subject to light in the church in naming trauma, discuss how it comes out and ways of addressing and treating it.

A historical understanding of trauma must begin with the biblical text. In using the Bible as a starting point, one finds a mass of examples of God's children experiencing trauma. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is full of examples of God's children experiencing trauma as well as God's response to them in the midst of their suffering. Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden is traumatic and clearly illustrates God's presence with His wayward children. From Cain and Able, the Israelite's exile in captivity, the journey through the wilderness, Joseph being sold into slavery by his brother's, Job's losses, the woman at the well, the boy possessed by evil spirits, the woman caught in adultery, and the crucifixion, the Bible can be for all intents and purposes considered a book of traumas, and God's response to the trauma's and his children. However, in order to contextualize and understand the church's lack of response and preparation to deal with the aftermath of trauma and its effects on members of their

congregations, such a discussion and historical understanding must begin with the disconnect. The disconnect to be discussed is between the mental health community and the organized church.

The conversation between the mental health and religious communities is discourse that is long overdue. In the last two decades, a gradual shift has occurred and significant strides have been made toward that end. The collaboration became possible as researchers in the two communities slowly realized that the healing of an individual that has experienced a trauma or traumatic events could not happen without addressing the spiritual wounds that accompany these tragedies. According to Aten and Walker, “current research trends suggest that about half of all people will experience directly or vicariously some form of trauma over the course of their lifespan.”¹ Therefore, examining the effects of trauma on an individual’s experience of God and worship is necessary to equip churches and congregations with the tools necessary to create a welcoming community where healing can begin.

Traumas and traumatic events are complex phenomenon’s that affect each person differently. Frederick Streets warns against casting a large net over those who experience traumas and traumatic event. Street says,

Not everyone who has experienced a tragic and traumatic event will react to that experience in the same way or have similar needs in their efforts to cope with what has happened to them. Not everyone will experience post—traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other emotional difficulties. Not everyone will need medical, psychological, or pastoral care as a result of the having gone through a horrific episode.²

¹ Jamie D. Aten and Donald F. Walker, 2012, “Religion, Spirituality, and Trauma: An Introduction.” *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, vol. 40, no. 4: 255. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed August 12, 2015).

² Frederick J. Streets. 2005, “Preaching and Trauma: Preaching about resilience and human dignity,” *The Living Pulpit/October-December, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed August 12, 2015).

Judith Herman in her work *Trauma and Recovery* reports, "Traumas involves intense fears, helplessness, loss of control and threat of annihilation."³ Herman continues her definition when she says "Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptions to life."⁴ Exposure to traumatic events as described above have a devastating impact on the brains way of receiving and processing information. Memories can become distorted. Experiences can become lost. The ways of knowing become altered because of changes in and to the brain. Aten and Walker go to great depth to explain this phenomenon when they state,

When traumatic events occur, the brain does not process them explicitly (i.e. Verbally). In fact, the sequence of physiological events that follows exposure to trauma makes it extremely difficult to access traumatic memories explicitly and/or by choice.

When faced with an overwhelming traumatic event, the body releases glucocorticoids, or stress hormones. This is very adaptive, because these stress hormones mobilize needed energy and inhibit processes that get in the way of coping with immediate danger and terror. However, when one is chronically exposed to trauma, an excessive amount of stress hormones are released and can damage hippocampal neurons. Research has demonstrated that the prolonged stress experienced by war veterans and survivors of childhood sexual abuse results in high levels of glucocorticoids. The body then adapts to the experience of chronic stress, which leads to elevated baseline levels of stress hormones, and to abnormal rhythms of hormone release.⁵

In other words when a trauma is experienced it has the ability to literally freeze the brain. It is as though trauma causes the left side (the cognitive) and the right side (the emotional) to become disconnected from one another. Usually our body, emotions, and thoughts are all connected, but trauma separates these from one another. Left brain and right brain have to pull together, otherwise just one side is in charge.⁶

³ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma And Recovery: The Aftermath Of Violence— From Domestic Abuse To Political Terror* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1992), 33.

⁴ Hermann, *Trauma and Recovery*, 38.

⁵ Aten and Walker, *Trauma, Attachment, and Spirituality*, 303.

⁶ Wright, *The New Guide*, 202.

The sad reality is “if trauma occurs to a child, it hardwires the experience. In other words, the trauma can permanently affect the brain and all its functions.⁷ The urgency of the situation is surmised in the declaration,

If the population in our pews is representative of the world around us, 1 in 4 of those pew-sitters in the U.S. wrestle with a diagnosable mental disorder with few receiving any help or direction. Moreover, churches involved in evangelism and outreach may show even higher rates of disorder because if they are succeeding in their job of fulfilling the Great Commission, then many entering these churches could be beset with chaos and trouble like the church has never seen.⁸

Streets suggest, “As preachers, we must be prepared for this possibility.”⁹

Preachers, pastors, and congregations can prepare themselves to receive the wounded through education. He goes on to declare,

Pastors might broaden their understanding of their role by learning some of the basic psychosocial methods of assessing someone’s emotional and spiritual wellbeing. They might also learn more about the relationship of a person’s wellbeing to the way the culture influences the person’s self-understanding. Ethnicity, gender role, sexual orientation, theology, worship, and how faith helps the person live a meaningful life—all are factors to consider.¹⁰

Once again, the information presented reveals the church should be screaming for a prophetic ministry that addresses the effects of trauma as a whole upon a person by asking the question if trauma effects the individual’s ability to know, adapt, and trust their environment, then how does this individual experience God and worship?

⁷ Wright, *The New Guide*, 201.

⁸ Tim Clinton, Archibald Hart and George Ohlschlager, eds., *Caring for People God’s Way: Personal and Emotional Issues, Addictions, Grief, and Trauma* (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson, Inc. 2005), 9.

⁹ Streets, *Preaching and Trauma*, 22.

¹⁰ Streets, *Preaching and Trauma*, 22.

History of Counseling

In addressing the history of counseling, we want to divide the subject into two sections, secular and Christian. From a secular perspective, the history of counseling had its origins, first in religion, later in philosophy, and later still in medicine. Religion and philosophy asked many of the same questions: "Where did I come from? Where am I going? Why am I here?" Medicine on the other hand tends to ask the question "Are you covered by insurance?" From time to time, the members of a community would suffer from the vicissitudes of life. At such times, they would seek help from their priest, wise man, or witch doctor. Often all three offices were found in one person.¹¹

Generally the problems they faced were of two kinds; grief over the loss of a loved one, or guilt related to the problem of wrong behavior, sometimes called sin. There were other problems of course, ranging from love sickness, to anxiety, to madness. Such extraordinary problems called for extraordinary solutions. Love sickness had its potions, and anxiety its elixirs and counsel while madmen were often considered to be touched by the gods, and if not honored they were at worse driven from their community. Hannibal, Alexander, and Caesar with their bouts of epilepsy are examples of the former, whereas King David (1 Sm 21:10-15) and the maniac of Gadara (Lk 8:26-39) are examples of the latter. Such was the order of things for millennia. However, as populations grew and religions changed, madness began to be looked upon with less tolerance. In time, "mad houses" came into existence to deal with the impatience and fear of society with such people. It was about this time that psychiatry and psychology began to make their presence known. Both had their origins in 19th century Europe. However,

¹¹ Ralph Bass, History of Counseling, accessed March 2, 2016, http://www.livinghopepress.com/History_of_Counseling.html.

of the two, psychology was far more a product of science than was psychiatry. However, both were founded in the secular humanism of a Europe turned cold to the gospel of Christ and thereby far outside the pale of orthodox Christianity.¹²

Christian counseling has been a part of the work of ministry from the origin of the Church. “Ever since apostolic times, counseling has occurred in the Church as a natural function of corporate spiritual life.” Paul made it clear that he considered the family of God competent to counsel one another when the need arose. He said, “I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct (counsel) one another” (Rom 15:14). Like the helping mission of the pagans around them, Christianity also addressed the problems of grief and sin, although with considerably different counsel on how to deal with these problems.¹³

The Reformation, and later the Puritan movement in England and America saw a significant return by Christianity to the authority of the bible as the only source of “life and godliness.” What characterized the Puritans in particular was a practical application of the Word to the problems of life. In this sense, Christian counseling began to take on new significance. Several works stand out as exceptional representatives of this flow of valuable counsel to the Church. They are, Richard Baxter’s *A Christian Directory*, Thomas Brooks’ *Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices*, Jonathan Edwards’s *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, and Ichabod Spencer’s *A Pastor’s Sketches*. Much of these writings are what we might call “case study” in style.¹⁴

¹² Bass, “History of Counseling.”

¹³ Bass, “History of Counseling.”

¹⁴ Bass, “History of Counseling.”

Nevertheless, in time, the message of the church grew dim, and the void created by a Church with few answers, was address by creative minds with humanistic convictions. Foremost among this crowd was Sigmund Freud a physician from Vienna, Austria. Operating not simply from unchristian views, he was actually anti-Christian in his worldview. Freud postulated humanity without sin, helpless victims of their parents' failures. For a world struggling to free itself from a theological bondage of Reformed theology, which made mankind totally responsible for their moral failures, the blame shifting of the new psychologists and psychiatrists did not prove to be resistible. Europe and America in the 19th and 20th centuries begin to flock to the answers of the questions of the dilemmas of life posited by these men.¹⁵

In time, Christian ministers began to be aware that they were no longer looked to for answers on problems of living, as they once were. Indeed, the unspoken consensus was that Christianity did not have answers for these new problems. Not only did the humanists believe this; Christians themselves came to hold the same position. The liberals in the Church addressed these serious problems of living by Christians, either by "deferring and referring" to "those properly trained to deal with 'real' problems," (psychologists or psychiatrist) or by obtaining the psychological training that would equip them to this task. The conservatives saw the problem as a lack of commitment, bible study, prayer, and faithful attendance of all the church services. In other words, they denied its existence.

In the '60's a new breed of evangelical, represented by Bruce Narramore presented an alternative to the capitulation of liberalism on the one hand, and the denial of fundamentalism on the other. Their answer was the "Christianization" of psychiatry

¹⁵ Bass, "History of Counseling."

and psychology. Their rallying cry was “all truth is God’s truth.” With this banner held high, they boldly attacked the gates of neurosis, snatching brands from the mass of the depressed. Orthodox Christians flocked to read the new books harmonizing orthodox Christianity and the humanism of psychology and psychiatry. This solution captured the imagination of the Church; it continues to do so to this day. However, in the early 70’s a professor of practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Dr. Jay E. Adams, pioneered a new approach. In response to the responsibilities given him to teach counseling to the students at Westminster, he developed a counseling method, which he dubbed nouthetic counseling. Essentially, he asserted that in scripture, the Christian has everything he needs for life and Godliness. The problem with the Church, he stated, was that it had not made the scripture useful by means of proper exegesis, and functionally relevant with useful applications to the problems of life. His writings started a quiet, slow growing, revolution in many conservative/orthodox churches. It is this return to the Bible, that has brought Christianity full circle in its application of scripture to the practical and difficult problems of life.¹⁶

Pastoral Counseling in the 21st Century: The Centrality of Community

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, religious leaders became increasingly interested in the explanatory power and methods of the psychological sciences relating to understanding and healing psychological suffering. One of the earliest examples of this interest was the creation of the Emmanuel Movement wherein clergy relied on human sciences for counseling church members struggling with psychological suffering. Across the ocean, pastors like Oskar Pfister (1909) saw value in using the new science of

¹⁶ Bass, “History of Counseling.”

psychology in their pastoral work. By the middle of the 20th century, there was a shift by clergy using psychology in their pastoral work to establishing a professional organization of clergy who increasingly viewed pastoral counseling as a specific ministry of the church, whether it was in their respective churches, in counseling centers, or private practice. This movement was not without its controversies, one of which concerned the locus of pastoral identity and authority. Seward Hiltner and Wayne Oates represented those who opposed a national professional organization. Hiltner, in particular, “resisted segregating pastoral counseling from parish life. He believed pastoral counseling must stay anchored in the institutional church, and he rejected Howard Clinebell’s location of pastoral in the therapeutic person.”¹⁷

Both Oates and Hiltner believed that the ministry of pastoral counseling was an integral part of the ecclesia and the idea of a professional organization that certified pastoral counselors to be in private practice contradicted the ecclesial foundations of ministry. Their criticisms while not serving as an obstacle to the inauguration of the AAPC (American Association of Pastoral Counselors) in 1963, helped enshrine the AAPC’s institutional expectation that pastoral counselors be connected to and participate in their respective communities of faith.¹⁸

The importance of community vis-à-vis the ministry of pastoral counseling is reflected in John Patton’s depiction of pastoral counseling and its distinctiveness from other types of counseling. Patton wrote,

¹⁷ Ryan LaMothe, "Pastoral counseling in the 21st century," *Journal Of Pastoral Care & Counseling (Online)* 68, no. 2: 1-17, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 3, 2016).

¹⁸ LaMothe, "Pastoral counseling in the 21st century."

Pastoral counselors are representatives of the central image of life and its meaning affirmed by their religious communities. Thus, pastoral counseling offers a relationship to that understanding of life and faith through the person of the pastoral counselor. This emphasis upon a relationship to the religious community distinguishes pastoral counseling both from religious counseling in general and from certain types of psychotherapy. Whereas religious counseling and some secular therapies commonly teach particular practices and/or systems of belief, pastoral counseling is identified by the representation of the community which authorizes it through a relationship to a pastor accountable to that community.¹⁹

According to Echoing, Hiltner, and Oates, Patton argues that the ecclesia authorizes this ministry, and that the pastoral counselor is accountable, primarily to his/her community of faith and its theological traditions and not simply to a professional organization. Clearly, for Patton, pastoral counselors, like their secular counterparts, learn particular counseling practices and theories based in the human sciences. Unlike them, however, they are accountable to a particular community of faith and its theological traditions. Moreover, the pastoral counselor ideally uses his/her theological tradition along with the psychological sciences in understanding the psychosocial dilemmas of clients. The notions that the ecclesia authorizes the ministry of pastoral counseling and that the pastoral counselor is accountable to his/her community of faith continue to remain a part of AACPs ethos.²⁰

Community

The concept of community appears frequently in social discourse, suggesting its emotional importance. People struggle to corral its many meanings. They may point to a specific group, town, professional association, state, group of nations or to experiences of

¹⁹ LaMothe, "Pastoral counseling in the 21st century."

²⁰ LaMothe, "Pastoral counseling in the 21st century."

communion. The concept of community is protean, varying in meaning, from one philosopher to another. The work of Scottish philosopher John Macmurray is used to explicate the concept of community and its attributes. Macmurray's conception is particularly relevant because he returned repeatedly, over the course of his professional life, to the idea of community and its relation to society and other forms of association, emphasizing the importance of immunity with regard to human freedom, consciousness, reality, knowledge, and truth. Macmurray's philosophical notions of immunity and interpersonal relations, which were influenced, in part, by Ian Suttie shaped the thinking of Guntrip, Fairbairn, R. D. Laing and others, as they sought to develop object relations theory or, in Fairbairn's view, personal relations theory. Whereas these psychoanalysts began with the person as primary focus, Lamothe began with community, as did Macmurray for whom there is no such thing as a person without community—community precedes and founds the individual and his/her personal life.²¹

The principle of unity in community is the personal component that necessarily accompanies the motive and commitment to share in a common life. Macmurray used the notions of family, fellowship, and friendship to denote the kind of interpersonal relationship founded on mutual recognition and treatment of the other as person, as well as the motivation for and commitment to share in a common life. It is “the sharing of a common life,” he wrote, “which constitutes the individual personality. We become persons in community, in virtue of our relations to others.” A characteristic of personal relationships that found community is that they have no ulterior motive. They are not based on particular interests. They do not serve partial or limited ends. Their value lies

²¹ LaMothe, "Pastoral counseling in the 21st century."

entirely in themselves. This point does not mean that individuals in community do not have other conscious and unconscious motives or that communal relationships do not have other functions and purposes. Clearly, other motives and functions exist in community, but they do not determine the aim or longevity of the relationship. When these motives change or functions pass, the relationship to its core is unchanged—the recognition and treatment of the other as a person and a commitment to share in a common life remain.²²

In sum, community comprises interpersonal relationships wherein Others are recognized and treated as persons and a shared motivation and commitment to live a common life exists. This common life is rooted in deep core symbols (language, narratives, rituals) that support and maintain synchronic and diachronic unconditional, personal obligations, loyalty, and trust. Conditional obligations, loyalties, and trusts are necessarily part of a life lived in common, but these remain subordinate to and conditioned by the unconditional obligation to recognize and treat the other as a person. This shared personal recognition possesses its own particularity as it corresponds to each specific community and its unique narratives, language, and rituals, all which shape daily life, in addition to personal, shared memories and hopes for the future life lived in common.²³

²² LaMothe, "Pastoral counseling in the 21st century."

²³ LaMothe, "Pastoral counseling in the 21st century."

Pastoral Counseling and Community

Pastoral counseling, Patton noted, is distinctive in that the counselor's ministry is rooted in the particular ecclesia in which s/he functions and that s/he may represent God and as well as a community of faith. Pastoral counseling is distinctive from secular psychologies because the pastoral counselor relies on communitarian anthropology to understand human suffering and its healing and sustaining models. This anthropology provides a lens through which the pastoral counselor can further view the counseling relationship itself, diagnosis, along with the counseling goals. Pastoral counselors also use various psychological theories of understanding the individual as well as the associated processes and aims of counseling.

The pastoral counseling relationship is a contractual and functional form of association. At its best, the relationship instantiates mutual-personal relations associated with community. The term client or patient refer both to the functionality and contractual nature of the relationship. Struggling with some difficulty in daily living, clients seek the aid of pastoral counselors. If all goes well, they agree to meet for a length of time with the aim of understanding, coming to terms with, and, if possible, alleviating the person's suffering. Ideally, once the counseling has achieved its goals, the relationship terminates. While this is a contractual and functional relationship, it is founded on the good enough pastoral counselor's recognition and treatment of the client as a person and, secondarily, as a client. That is, the terms client and patient are secondary and subordinate to personalization. Other secular therapists may function in much the same way, as personalization alone would not constitute pastoral counseling's distinctiveness. Most anthropologies of many secular therapies are rooted in Western notions of individualism

thereby inextricably linking to a disenchanted and disembodied subject. Cushman argues that therapy colludes with the construction of atomized selves and mirror a capitalistic ethos.²⁴

Pastoral Counseling and the Church

From a structural point of view, what we now call pastoral counseling, emerged from the long tradition of the church in what was called on the European Continent the care of souls, and in England pastoral care. Pastors had always given some of their time to the problems and potentialities of individual and families. Even those churches that did not have an ordained or specially educated body of pastors recognized their communal responsibility for care within their ranks. Some of the care was focused around the restoration of people, whenever possible, after they had committed offenses against the religious community and presumably also against God. Some of it was simply to help people get through the crisis situations of life. And some of it, as in the so-called spiritual direction of the Roman Catholic Church, was centered on potentials rather than on problems. In all these dimensions of pastoral care of former times, there were occasions when the parishioner took initiative in consulting the pastor, when he or she recognized that at least part of the problem was in the self, and when some kind of contract, however implicit, was entered into in order that pastor might best help parishioner. Until our own century, however, that kind of helping situation was not singled out with a special name.

²⁴ LaMothe, "Pastoral counseling in the 21st century."

But the structural rootage of pastoral counseling within the pastoral care dimension of ministry is clear.²⁵

The dynamics, however, were not identical with the structure. If there had not been a Sigmund Freud as well as an Anton Boisen, we would not have pastoral counseling in the modern sense, nor would we have an enlightened pastoral care for those many situations in which a counseling contract is not needed or not desired by the person. It was in part from secular sources that the insights came upon which more competent pastoral care and pastoral counseling could be based. The initial and still most basic contribution was not how to go about specific helping procedures, but how to understand what is actually going on, partly below the level of awareness, within the person and between the person and other people.

In the history of the church there is no novelty in the process of accepting wisdom from secular sources. Augustine and many others among the early church fathers learned from the philosophy and science of their day; and Thomas Aquinas found in Aristotle what he could not discover in his contemporaries. John Calvin's immersion in classical scholarship was basic to the creative thrust he gave to the theology of his time. Persons such as these, like Anton Boisen and others within our own movement, did two things. They probed deeply into the wisdom from secular sources, attempting to be free of bias in appraising the claims to truth. When such claims appeared to them to have validity, they reworked everything from their primary theological perspective to take the new wisdom into account. They were not content, on the one side, to take bits and pieces of the secular wisdom, or on the other side, to substitute the assumptions behind the discoverers of the

²⁵ Seward Hiltner, "Pastoral counseling and the church," *The Journal Of Pastoral Care* 31, no. 3: 194-209, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 4, 2016).

secular insights for their own theological rootage. In his own way, Boisen worked as hard at these two tasks as had Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.²⁶

When the new insights were put into a pastoral framework, first through the clinical pastoral education movement and then also through better teaching in theological schools greatly improved pastoral care began to emerge in local churches, and a part of that was an identifiable pastoral counseling in situations where that was relevant. Among pastors of local churches who profited from the new forms of education, there was, at least theoretically, no need for tension between the first and second aspects of my thesis. These pastors were clearly representatives of the church in all dimensions of their ministry including pastoral care and pastoral counseling. They were ordained, set aside to perform general leadership functions in the church. They were also sent or called to minister to specific groups of people, whether a bishop or a congregation made the decision. Their tasks, for the most part, included the whole range of ministerial leadership functions. Their pastoral care was clearly only a part of their total ministerial functions, but a part they could exercise with a skill and understanding far beyond that of their predecessors.²⁷

After the local church, the next modern test of the congruity between the first and second aspects of our thesis came in relation to chaplaincy in health and welfare institutions. Before Boisen, such ministries had usually been detached, episodic, and lacking in competence. Some of the chaplains were competent and properly representative of the church, but their schedules permitted only brief passes at ministry to the special populations about whom they had had no education. Others of the chaplains

²⁶ Hiltner, "Pastoral counseling and the church."

²⁷ Hiltner, "Pastoral counseling and the church."

were only dubiously representative of the church. The incompetent among them were friends of the superintendent or warden; and the conscientious ones ran libraries, and social services and recreation programs with little attention to religious ministry.²⁸

When pastoral counseling began to be extended to settings other than the local church or the chaplaincy, it confronted new kinds of potential problems and temptations in terms of relating both aspects of the thesis. Even when the setting was clearly some appropriate form of church, as in a denomination's geographical area or a council of churches or an accredited theological school, there was a setting-off of pastoral counseling from other forms of pastoral care, whereas both had been included in local church and chaplaincy. Pastoral counseling came to be thought of not only as a specially structured but temporary kind of helping relationship but also as physically structured within the counselor's office. There were few house calls. The usual pastoral ways of meeting people initially and informally tended to disappear.²⁹

Theological professors should be the first to be sensitive to the way in which a setting that contains privileges or protections may carry the temptation to inflate one's own work and denigrate that of other ministers. If they get by their probationary period, they are given appointments on indefinite tenure so that they cannot be fired except for heinous acts or provocative heresies. Privileged to labor in functionally specialized areas of theological scholarship, they may become so emotionally attached to the guild of their special discipline that their sense of identification with the ministry becomes atrophied. Sometimes this is even truer of the professor who ministered in a local church early in his career than in those who have never done so and may be suitably humble about it as a

²⁸ Hiltner, "Pastoral counseling and the church."

²⁹ Hiltner, "Pastoral counseling and the church."

result. Some of our most intransigent problems in educating people for effective ministry arise because these temptations have been yielded to.³⁰

The history of the church offers many examples of how the combined search for financial viability and the need for reasonable freedom of action, both legitimate aims, can lead to the decline of church representativeness and of ministry in the work. Protestant hospitals, for instance, very nearly became a flaming case in point. By the late 1930's a considerable number of the 450 hospitals were headed by a clergyman supposed to be both administrator and chaplain. Russell Dicks challenged this group to secure well-trained chaplains, since it was clear that, in a battle between administrative and chaplaincy duties, administration would always win. Such hospitals receive a continually decreasing proportion of their financial support from the church. But the establishment of full-time chaplaincies, occupied by competent and well-educated pastors, has helped at least many of these hospitals to maintain their church connection in an appropriate way.³¹

As to individual pastoral counselors, their representation of the church as ministers is partly assured by the administrative arrangements, as noted above, of the center or group with which they work. Even in instances where there is only one pastoral counselor, a suitable organization with some appropriate kind of church relationship can enable the principle of church accountability to be observed. Such a mode of organization is radically different from hanging out a shingle, imposing and collecting fees directly from the persons served, and being accountable to no group that represents the church in any appropriate way. Ministry is validated by its representativeness as well as its

³⁰ Hiltner, "Pastoral counseling and the church."

³¹ Hiltner, "Pastoral counseling and the church."

competence; and if it represents nothing that is visible, it has ceased to become ministry of the church.³²

The greatest strength of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC) has been its work to increase the competence of pastoral counselors, and secondarily to show up the incompetent for what they are. Especially if pastoral counselors can escape the ambiguous burden of state licensing, in view of primary loyalty to the church and primary identification with professional ministry, the importance of this function may be even greater in the future than it has been in the past. There are of course other strengths as well: mutual exchange and fellowship, stimulus to research and reflection, developing ethical guidelines for practice, and much else. And not least among the strengths is the trans-denominational character of the membership.³³

³² Hiltner, "Pastoral counseling and the church."

³³ Hiltner, "Pastoral counseling and the church."

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Domestic violence, natural disasters, motor vehicle accidents (MVA's) are a few examples of the lenses that traumas and traumatic events are experienced through. Black, liberation, and systemic theologies are just a few mediums through which prophetic preachers are challenged to reveal God to a broken, suffering, and lost world.

Howard Thurman, who is both a Black and liberation theologian, in his seminal work entitled *Jesus and the Disinherited* uses the word fear instead of trauma to characterize one of the hounds of hell that continually plague those that are less fortunate. “When the basis of such fear is analyzed, it is clear that it arises out of the sense of isolation and helplessness in the face of the varied dimensions of violence to which the underprivileged are exposed.”¹ The other two hounds of hell described by Thurman, deception and hate are equally traumatic to the individual upon whom they rest. Based upon Thurman’s assertion God is revealed as fully present and involved in the lived experiences of His children and how they relate to one another. Using a traumatic event to make his point Thurman states,

During the great Vanport Oregon disaster, when rising waters left thousands homeless, many people of Portland who, prior to that time were sure of their “white supremacy,” opened their homes to Negroes, Mexicans, and Japanese. The result was that they were all confronted with the experience of universality. They were no longer white, black, and brown. They were men, women, and children in the presence of the operation of impersonal Nature. Under the pressure they were

¹ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 37.

human family, and each stood in immediate candidacy for the profoundest fellowship, understanding, and love.²

Henri J. M. Nouwen, a European systematic theologian reveals a God through Christ that is ever ready to respond to the needs of his hurting children when they call because He attends to his wounds one at a time. In his work *The Wounded Healer*, Nouwen recalls,

How does the Liberator come? I found an old legend in the Talmud which may suggest to us the beginning of an answer: Rabbi Yosua ben Levi came upon Elijah the prophet while he was standing at the entrance of Rabbi Simeron ben Yohai's cave...He asked Elijah, When with the Messiah come? Elijah replied, Go and ask him yourself. Where is he? Sitting at the gates of the city. How shall I know him? He is sitting among the poor covered with wounds. The others unbind all their wounds at the same time and then bind them up again. But he unbinds one at a time and binds it up again, saying to himself, "Perhaps I shall be needed: if so I must always be ready so as not to delay for a moment (Taken from the tractate Sanhedrin).

For Nouwen God through Jesus is always present amongst his children waiting for the call to be of service.

The common thread that is woven throughout each theology is the understanding and application of suffering in the lives of believers. When coupled with the revelation of God's presence and willingness to immediately respond through Christ to the needs of his creation, the ethos of love becomes real and the healing of wounds begins as individuals share their stories.

Trauma, Identity and Theology: Scars and Stigma

In recent years, the concept of trauma has become an important aspect of understanding human life. This is the case not only in the helping professions, but also in the public domain. Individual experiences like car accidents as well as collective events

² Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 104.

like disasters and terrorist attacks are easily called traumatic. By using that term, we refer to shattering life events and we invoke the expectation that those involved suffer deeply and will be affected for the rest of their lives. Scars are supposed to last. The term thus carries profound dramatic and tragic overtones. The popularity of the term trauma has not always been like this. Herman has documented how attention for trauma has gone up and down in the past century, the shifts being directly related to social and political forces in society. In the light of these developments in attending to trauma, the disrupting power of traumatic experiences calls for profound reflection on the meaning of trauma for identity. When indeed our whole being is affected by traumatization, how does this relate to our identity? The connection between trauma and theology is not that far-fetched, given the fact that both deal with vital dimensions of our existence and given the fact that the Christian tradition—to name but one—has a traumatic experience as its nuclear story. In this tradition, the stigmata are a powerful metaphor for exploring the inter-action of trauma and identity.³

Identity is taken here as the narrative construction of who the person is; her or his own life course in relations to other persons. Whereas the life course regards the phenomenal level of the facts, experiences and actions, occurring in a person's life between birth and death, identity is the story one tells about oneself. This story serves two main purposes. It first distinguishes the self from others to develop and maintain a sense of uniqueness in relation to others. Each one of us is not merely an exemplar of the human race, exchangeable with others, but a unique person. The events in the life course

³ Reinder Ruard Ganzevoort, "Scars and stigmata: trauma, identity and theology," *Practical Theology* 1, no. 1: 19–31, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 1, 2016).

are integrated in the person's life story in such a way that the person's identity is supported. The second purpose of the life story is that it describes the consistent elements through which one can say that the present self is the same as the past or future self. Life events therefore are integrated in the life story to the degree that they contribute to this sense of continuity.⁴

Trauma can be described as the psychological wound resulting from the confrontation with a serious event that shatters a person's integrity and induces powerlessness and estrangement. Contrary to common parlance, trauma is not the event as such, but the impact of the event on the person. Whether or not a trauma occurs following a particular event depends on the content and seriousness of the event, but also on the person's personality, coping skills, attribution of meaning, resources, and so on. The complexity of the definition reveals a complex phenomenon. The serious events may range from war through street violence to car accidents to childhood sexual abuse. Some would even count in medical events, but generally speaking these would not have the same disrupting quality. The victims can be civilians, soldiers, or terrorists. The effects may be expected or accidental. The event may be a one-time incident or life-long oppression. Obviously, the details of traumatization will be crucial for understanding the impact of trauma on identity. In general terms, we only speak of trauma when the event contains a direct threat to life. This may involve the person's physical life, it may involve one's integrity of being, or it may take the shape of witnessing a threat to the life of another person.⁵

⁴ Ganzevoort, "Scars and stigmata," 20.

⁵ Ganzevoort, "Scars and stigmata," 20.

Trauma as a Threat to Identity

In connecting trauma and identity, we can observe two diametrically opposed positions. For better or for worse, traumatizing events are part of our life course. Obviously, that does not mean we get an even share. Some of us are confronted with several severe traumatizing events; others encounter a relatively smooth and easy life. It does not mean either that specific events have the same valence or meaning for all: what is an unbearable torture for one person may be a painful yet tolerable experience for others. These events happen as part of our life course and that we are called to attribute meanings to them.⁶

The first position takes trauma essentially as a threat to identity. The central issue here is that traumatization interrupts the person's life course. The direction of this person's life, the central values expressed in it, the taken for granted meanings and structures, everything is disrupted by traumatization. From now on, nothing is the same anymore. The traumatizing event is completely alien to the identity of the person, and it is traumatizing precisely because it is alien. Traumatization disrupts the life course that forms the basis of our life story and thus undermines our identity.⁷

The meaning of traumatization in this perspective is a massive confrontation with darkness and death. It threatens to destroy life, as we know it. This is a complete opposition between the meanings embedded in our identity, and the meanings of traumatization. We may, for example, consider ourselves to be well balanced, nice, caring, and rational human beings, yet in a situation of traumatization discover that we

⁶ Ganzevoort, "Scars and stigmata," 20.

⁷ Ganzevoort, "Scars and stigmata," 20.

are feeble, egoistic, and impulsive survivors. Or on a more fundamental level, we may build our life on the assumption that life is meaningful and that God cares for us, yet find ourselves in total despair and utter meaninglessness when confronted with traumatization. When our identity seeks to maintain a sense of continuity through all the vicissitudes of life, traumatization represents the kind of discontinuity that cannot be integrated. To the degree that our identity serves to distinguish the self from others, thereby facilitating meaningful interactions with others, traumatization isolates the persons from his or her significant others.

Trauma as Identity Marker

The second, diametrically opposed, prototypical position takes traumatization as a turning point in one's life course. That does not mean that one should rejoice in it, but it acknowledges that these events are so essential in our life course that they define our identity. We are the persons we are because of the traumata we have suffered. Our choices, actions, and longings that follow from our identity narrative—the story we tell about ourselves—and that seek to confirm this narrative result from these traumata. Whether we have integrated these traumatic incidents in our story or in contrast try to exclude them, the impact of trauma is such that it works through in how we can and cannot tell the story. This means that we cannot conceive of ourselves without these experiences, even if we try to exclude them. Sometimes we may indulge in the what-if questions: what kind of person would we have become if this or that had not happened? These questions are futile from this second perspective. If I had not experienced bullying in school, sexual intimidation, moving from one town to another, and so on, and so forth,

I simply would not have been me. My life would have been different, but it would not be my life. The uniqueness of the person as well as his or her possibilities of engaging with others are shaped and marked by the traumata that are part of the life course.⁸

The difference between this second response of accepting and integrating those scars and the first response of resisting the forces that are behind the scarring involves the meanings of the stigmata as part and ground of one's identity or as alien to it. For counseling this is an important lesson: the meanings of traumatization are open to reinterpretation, and the degree to which a person rejects the scars or integrates them as stigmata, tells us much about his or her life story and spiritual frame of reference. One reason for the difference between people choosing either of these prototypical positions lies in the dimension of time. At the moment of impact, traumatization is usually experienced as an intrusion of alien, enemy forces. Later on, however, and looking back on whom we have become, we cannot but incorporate the traumatic experiences. Because they have actually taken place, we cannot think of ourselves outside of these experiences. By consequence, the logic for our suffering is a retrospective one. That is, traumatizing events should never happen to us, but when they have happened, they are a necessary part of our identity. Finding some kind of religious meaning in suffering can be an important element in making the transitions from position one to position two, from resistance to acceptance, from scars to stigmata.

⁸ Ganzevoort, "Scars and stigmata," 20.

Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining

In the past few decades, trauma has become a central concept in the understanding of human experience. Although it is usually experienced as an unexpected and unwanted intrusive incident, it is in fact one of the commonalities of life. Many people find themselves at some point overwhelmed by the magnitude of such events, be they tragic experiences like natural disasters or confrontations with evil actions of fellow humans. In theology, we are only beginning to take seriously that trauma is indeed such a central concept. There are of course astute contributions from currents as diverse as liberation theology, post-holocaust theology, and *theologia crucis*, but mainstream theology always tends to stress development, linearity towards the future, and victory. A second look at our biblical tradition, however, reveals how central trauma is in the narratives and rituals. Key stories of oppression in Egypt and the exilic disaster speak to collective trauma. Individual trauma is at the heart of the first story out of Eden—the family tragedy of Cain and Abel—and the main story of the New Testament—crucifixion. The rituals of baptism (drowning) and Eucharist (torture) are likewise deeply traumatic symbols.⁹

In her book, Shelly Rambo takes this omnipresent reality of trauma as her starting-point for a theological exploration. She takes trauma not as the exception to normality, but as the game-changer that demands a new way of looking at theology itself. In doing so, she creates space for traumatized people to be acknowledged and for suffering that remains. She does so by developing a ‘language of remaining’ that connects the witnessing of traumatized people with the middle ground that appears in Holy Saturday, the gospel of John, and in fact pneumatology. Witnessing, she claims, connects

⁹ Reinder Ruard Ganzevoort, "Spirit and trauma: a theology of remaining," *Modern Believing* 53, no. 4: 438-440, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 1, 2016).

us to a death event, addresses unspeakable atrocities, and reshapes life in the light of death.¹⁰

Rambo relates primarily to Caruth's literary readings of psychoanalytic theory, notably Freud's. Trauma theory deals with the encounter with death, an encounter that is not fully conscious and integrated, but returns in unrecognizable form. In this way, death continues to impact on life after the traumatic event. This leads to an oscillation between death and life that remains in the traumatized person's life. Trauma confronts a person with both life and death and creates a middle space. Reading (biblical) texts in this light looks not only for truths conveyed in these stories, but also for truths that are not fully known or understood. This yields an alternative understanding of what it means to witness.¹¹

Rambo engages profoundly with the writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar about Holy Saturday. These writings seem to be partly conceptual, partly mystical, and allow for simultaneous expression of the encounter with life and death. This leads to a fragile transformation. Rambo then moves on to consider this in-between space in the post-passion narrative in the gospel of John. Jesus is recognized at the same time that he eludes recognition. In these chapters, Rambo shows a keen ability for detailed analysis, insightful readings of all-too-familiar texts. If there is a redemptive story post-trauma, it is an ambiguous story of redemptive love in the light of remaining suffering.

Rainbo's contribution to the conversation on trauma and theology is challenging and timely. She opens up new perspectives that change both our theology and our

¹⁰ Ganzevoort, "Spirit and trauma," 439.

¹¹ Ganzevoort, "Spirit and trauma," 439.

understanding of trauma. Having said that, there are also limitations to the study. Most importantly, the author limits herself to psychoanalytical and especially literary approaches. Although meaningful, this overlooks the significance of recent contributions from neurosciences, cognitive psychology, positive psychology, anthropology, and other disciplines that would add to the conversation. Of course, no one can cover everything, but we dearly miss the available insights concerning resilience factors, the role of traumatic responses in self-defiance, the role of cognitive schemata or fundamental assumptions, the role of liminality in exploring new meaning, and perhaps most of all, the newer investigations into post-traumatic growth. All these have powerful connections to theology. Had the author engaged with the most recent literature, this would have made more effective her contribution to trauma studies.¹²

Theorizing the "Black Body" as a Site of Trauma

There are countless ways that one can theorize, or under theorize, the Black body and the ways that the Black body can be symbolized as a semiotic figuration of both pain and pleasure and as a site of trauma and grace. Even more, theorizing the Black body as a figure located at different historicized scenes and how these sightings ostensibly quicken traumatic memories and memorialize the body as a site of trauma. It is this perpetual experience of traumatization, that will be argued, which frustrates the healing potentiality of theologies of embodiment.¹³

¹² Ganzevoort, "Spirit and trauma," 440.

¹³ Darnell L. Moore, "Theorizing the 'black body' as a site of trauma: implications for theologies of embodiment," *Theology & Sexuality* 15, no. 2: 175-188. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 1, 2016).

First, in what ways have religious scholars theorized, or under-theorized, the Black body, and the Black church's response to embodiment and sexuality? Second, how is the Black body configured as a site of trauma and what is the utility of theorizing the Black body as a figure of embodied trauma? Lastly, what implications do the latter have on the ways we theologize embodiment in the Black church?¹⁴

Prognosis: Somatic Dis-Ease

The obvious problems that complicate any talk about the body, reflections on blackness, and imaginations of the body; to borrow a term coined by philosopher George Yancey, raciated as Black. To be sure, we must ask: Is it not dangerous to speak existentially about the body—or bodies—as if there exists an accepted model of embodiment that can be easily characterized? Furthermore, is it not counterproductive to talk about blackness as if it is a common phraseology used by all to connote an essential category of racialized cultural difference? Lastly, how can one speak historically of a Black body as a particularized object while not taking into account the limitless ways that Black bodies exist, speak, emote, distort, arouse, and enchant? You may be wondering, for example, whether talk of a Black body will limit the ways we come to know and experience the many Black bodies located at various scenes like those present in our now and the bodies that journeyed in our past, Black bodies located in so-called first-world regimes and those existing in empire-ridden third-world spaces, those that died in the

¹⁴ Moore, "Theorizing the 'black body,'" 177.

Middle Passage and those that crossed just to get double-crossed, the colonized and those living amidst post-colonization?¹⁵

Many of the writers theorize the Black body as a site of pleasure. The Black body is caricatured as a scene of bliss, titillation, and other-indulgence, and wonderment: it is to be safely touched and explored; it is an abode wherein the Spirit—unlimitedly present—emits and entrances; it is acceptable, valuable, desirable, and ebullient; and it is good.

For instance, Womanist ethicist Katie Geneva Cannon in her insightful essay "Sexing Black Women: Liberation from the Prison- house of Anatomical Authority," writes about the particular ways that Black churchwomen live in tension maneuvering between an affirming understanding of sex as positive and sex as repugnant. Cannon labors to name and witness against violent forces like hetero-patriarchy, racism and sexism, hetero-normativity, and puritanical sensibilities that render the bodies of African-American women invisibly visible, sullied, and debased. Of resistance calling upon African-American women to embrace their bodies, to touch and to be touched, to essentially embody their bodies. For Cannon, this somatic embrace, or what she calls genital-sexual eroticism, is nothing less than a gift from God. Thus she insists, upon a view of the Black body as a pleasurable location for human intimacy over and against ideologies, theologies, and discourses that are grounded in anti-sexual ambivalence and that troubles African-American women's desires to image their bodied-selves as

¹⁵ Moore, "Theorizing the 'black body,'" 180.

pleasurable. The central concern, for Cannon, is the peeling away of the veiled representations of the Black body as despicable and unspiritual.¹⁶

To fully embody the body is to live into its totality as a spiritual/sexual-erotic temple. In fact, pastoral theologian Horace Griffin contends that it is the very abandonment of this understanding of the Black body, an understanding of it as more profane than sacred, that results in what he calls spiritual estrangement. Spiritual estrangement, as Griffin understands it, subsequently prevents African-Americans from loving, embracing, and fully embodying their bodies. As a result, the authors encourage African-American Christians to do away with Platonist constructions of dualistic orientations even while acknowledging the Platonic paradigm (e.g., a negative view of the flesh/carnality/corporeality and positive view of the spirit) that is very much a part of Christian theology. In response, biblical scholar Michael Joseph Brown in his essay states:

Rather than continuing to denigrate our bodies as a source of animal-like behavior, our unfortunate inheritance of an Euro-American Christian paradigm, African-Americans should develop a theological anthropology that posits corporeal existence as the foundation for our experiences of joy and pain, intimacy and alienation, finitude and existence. Brown's statement takes the form of a rebuke, in a sense, as he urges African-Americans to cease the somatic disease that causes hate of the body rather than love for the body.¹⁷

The stern tone that characterizes Brown's statement, was similar to the chastising tone that was characteristic of many of the essays that addressed the Black Church and its seeming inability or unwillingness to talk about the body. For example, theologian Dwight Hopkins provides the following admonishment:

¹⁶ Moore, "Theorizing the 'black body,'" 179.

¹⁷ Moore, "Theorizing the 'black body,'" 181.

The irony is African-American Christians have opposed white Christian racists on grounds that they continue to pit a gospel of spiritual liberation against a gospel of material freedom for Black folk... Yet, Black Christians then unite with the same theological structures of thought regarding the body-soul bifurcation. Conceptually the split between body and soul or body and mind fervently preached in too many churches implies double trouble for Black believers.¹⁸

Hopkins is clear that African-American Christians are responsible for the somatic dis-ease that frustrates the bodily embrace of African-American Christians, despite the effects of White racist and white Christian racist ideology on African-American Christian's "theological structures of thought." He goes on to name what he understands to be problems that the Black Church must address:

First, the church fails to craft a positive theology of eroticism for the Black body (especially the male identity), which helps to drive many Black men away from Christian institutions. Second, the notion of the split perpetuates further the dangerous myth that a theology separating mind and body reinforces religious claims that Black people are "body" people. They embody carnal tastes, nasty sex, and lustful libido. So, Blacks who advocate this split are actually affirming theories about their own bestiality and lasciviousness.¹⁹

It is clear from this reading that Hopkins finds fault with the Black Church in regards to its failure to design sex-body-erotic positive theologies and for its perpetuation of notions of the Cartesian split in the theology that frames its preaching/teaching/living. Lee Butler, however, offers a more pronounced reprimand when he states, "We African-Americans, therefore, have sought to sacrificially escape our bodies through an over-spiritualization of our lives. We engage in an escapist process to transform that which is thought to be unholy into the holy by separating our sexuality from our spirituality." Butler's slamming criticism of African-Americans and the over-spiritualist, escapist, and

¹⁸ Moore, "Theorizing the 'black body,'"181.

¹⁹ Moore, "Theorizing the 'black body,'"181-182.

sacred/profane separatist attributes that seemingly characterize Black Christians are representative, in my estimation, of a false diagnosis or—even more—a move that too quickly ignores, fails to nuance, and problematize fixed notions of the Black body as a site of pleasure only, and of the ways that we subsequently image the Black body.²⁰

Spiritual Care After Violence: Growing from Trauma with Lived-Theology

According to Carrie Doebring, trauma is the bio-psycho-spiritual response to overwhelming life events. The more life triggers traumatic stressors, the greater the likelihood of trauma for individuals, as well as for families and communities. Traumatic events can be likened to earthquakes that sometimes open up crevasses deep down into those core beliefs, values, and ways of coping that formed us as children. Spiritual and pastoral care can help people identify and explore these embedded theologies that surface in trauma. Embedded theology consists of beliefs and values instilled throughout childhood, which exert an unconscious influence and surface under stress. Embedded theologies are those pre-critical and often unexamined beliefs and practices that have become a habitual part of one's worldview and practices. People may not be aware of their embedded theology until they experience an existential crisis or de-centering experience that disrupts their world, pushing deep layers of sometimes unconscious beliefs, values, and practices to the surface.²¹

²⁰ Moore, "Theorizing the 'black body,'" 181-182.

²¹ Carrie, Doebring, "Spiritual Care After Violence: Growing from Trauma with Lived-Theology," accessed March 1, 2016, <http://cct.biola.edu/blog/spiritual-care-after-violence-growing-trauma-lived-theology/>.

Such moments provide opportunities to excavate these beliefs, values, and habitual ways of coping, and decide whether such embedded theologies are still relevant and meaningful, especially in terms of helping people connect with a sense of the sacred and make sense of what is happening. This process of examining embedded theology involves deliberative theology, which Stone and Duke describe as “the understanding of faith that emerges from a process of carefully reflecting upon embedded theological convictions.” Whereas embedded theologies use first-order, often pre-critical expressions of religious experiences, deliberative theology draws upon informal and formal theological education to use second-order religious language to interpret and assess embedded theologies.²²

Pastoral and spiritual caregivers learn second-order ways of reflecting on beliefs and values through their theological education. Just as health professionals draw upon the health sciences and clinical training to identify, assess, and explore psychological responses to trauma, so, too, spiritual and pastoral caregivers are responsible for exploring, assessing, and helping trauma survivors create religious meanings and spiritual practices that are life-giving for them. It is challenging for theologically educated caregivers to draw explicitly upon their theological education in the practice of care. Biblical, historical, systematic, and comparative theological studies are highly specialized conversation partners that may not seem directly relevant in spiritual care conversations with trauma survivors. One’s own beliefs and practices are more immediately meaningful than abstract theologies. It is also easier to default to one’s own religious tradition than to engage what is different and even foreign about another’s worldview, beliefs, and

²² Doebring, “Spiritual Care After Violence.”

spiritual practices. Comparative studies of religion are especially important conversation partners for spiritual care outside of one's own community of faith.²³

The Role of Theological Reflexivity in Trauma Care

Theologically reflexive practitioners engage in conversations that critically assess how their own formative childhood relationships interact with social systems to shape their childhood embedded theologies and adult deliberative theologies. The process of theological reflexivity begins at this personal level in conversations that hold us responsible for identifying embedded theologies formed in childhood that still exert an influence which may be life-giving and life-limiting for us and/or others. Theological education, especially the kind of experiential education available through spiritually oriented clinical internships and clinical pastoral education, equips pastoral caregivers to think critically about these childhood theologies and whether they are still relevant and life-giving. Another level of theological reflexivity involves connecting one's personally meaningful childhood and adult theologies with public theologies that have withstood the test of time. Theological reflexivity provides a way to integrate one's theological education into one's own formation as a caregiver and into care for trauma survivors that identifies, assesses, and respects the unique ways they make spiritual sense of and cope with trauma.²⁴

²³ Doehring, "Spiritual Care After Violence."

²⁴ Doehring, "Spiritual Care After Violence."

The Process of Change in Theologically Grounded Trauma Care

Theologically grounded trauma care, is based on a theological theory of change. What changes for trauma survivors in theologically ground trauma care? In this case, change is described in terms of one's lived theology. Change occurs emotionally and physically as trauma survivors explore the lived theology constellated by intense trauma-related emotions like fear, anger, guilt, and shame. In summary, change happens when pastoral relationships help people integrate and embody spiritual practices that foster goodness and compassion with beliefs and values complex enough to account for suffering—one's own and the world's.²⁵

Spiritual practices provide unique resources for trauma survivors. Such practices can counteract the life-limiting theology that trauma may have generated or reinforced. A life-limiting theology of values, beliefs, and practices might be energized by trauma-related emotions. This lived theology might be reinforced by an implicit collective moral theology that makes a woman responsible for managing post-traumatic symptoms and may even make her feel responsible for traumatic experiences and/or how she responded. For example, a woman experiencing date rape may feel responsible for being vulnerable because of her alcohol use, or perhaps because she felt she did not monitor a seemingly safe context that became dangerous. Religious injunctions against consensual sexual contact outside of marriage could be mistakenly used to blame herself for nonconsensual sexual contact. In the process, she may confuse consensual and coercive sexual contact.²⁶

²⁵ Doehring, "Spiritual Care After Violence."

²⁶ Doehring, "Spiritual Care After Violence."

The possibility of pregnancy or sexually-transmitted disease might be construed as ways God could punish and publicly humiliate her if she needs to seek medical attention. Without any explicitly religious education about sexual violence, she might assume that her community of faith would shun her if she were to disclose what happened. This life-limiting theology contains many spiritual “sticking-points”—conflicts between pre-trauma beliefs/values and trauma-related doubts and questions, like “How could a loving God allow this to happen to me?” In this example, transitory religious and spiritual struggles can easily generate a subliminal theology of trauma. Those who experience trauma-related chronic religious struggle use negative religious coping that involves:

1. Believing in and experiencing God (or some transcendent order) as punitive and abandoning
2. Questioning God’s love/humanity’s goodness
3. Being discontented with their religious communities²⁷

Ongoing spiritual struggles and negative coping are associated with increased psychological and spiritual distress. On the other hand, survivors may be able to conserve life-giving practices and beliefs that connect them with God/goodness/support systems. Extensive research demonstrates that positive religious coping decreases psychological and spiritual distress (e.g., anxiety, depression) and increases posttraumatic psychological and spiritual growth, fostering spiritual integration.²⁸

²⁷ Doehring, “Spiritual Care After Violence.”

²⁸ Doehring, “Spiritual Care After Violence.”

A life-giving theology like this can help care seekers resist violence and compassionately accept the traumatic aftermath of violence in whatever ways possible. Life-giving theologies of traumatic suffering must be capable of ambiguity and complexity. Theologies of ambiguity hold perpetrators accountable while taking into account the ways persons and families easily become caught in systems in which power is abused, within cultures that often turn a blind eye to or condone violence. The more caregivers and care seekers can learn to integrate life-giving theologies into their everyday lives, the more they will be able to construct religious meanings and spiritual practices that enact justice in their personal, family, communal, and cultural lives.²⁹

²⁹ Doehring, "Spiritual Care After Violence."

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Let the patient be your teacher, and tackle the hard questions prior to the visit are timeless principles for dealing with trauma. This chapter provides foundational methods for pastors, care givers and ministry leaders when dealing with issues of trauma in ministry settings and how to best support members in their spiritual needs.

Caria Gober writes eloquently on providing spiritual care to the dying and bereaved. She touches on issues as practical as how to delivery difficult news to identifying religious, spiritual, cultural, and gender issues that may arise. Her presentation on bereavement process and theories leans heavily on stages or phases of grief with neat endings of resolution giving members permission to feel joy again. What is missing is some of the work done by professionals who recognize that grief is not so neatly packaged, accepted, or resolved. What was disappointing was her presentation of chaplaincy support as being offered only if the family agreed as well as a perceived lack of understanding about the role of the clinically trained and certified professional chaplain as a member of the interdisciplinary team, particularly in assessment and documentation.¹

¹ James G. Emerson, "Counseling survivors of traumatic events: a handbook for pastors and other helping professionals," *The Journal Of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 59, no. 4: 409-411, *ATLASerials, Religion Collection, EBSCOhost* (accessed March 6, 2016), 409.

The issue for the Christian considering the crisis in missionary kid (MK) education is not simply to survive but, rather, to thrive. We are engaged as co-laborers in the tasks of Christ's kingdom and the outcome of our strategy must be positive, healthy development of the members of that kingdom to the honor of the King. Christ's priorities must be our priorities if we are to be truly successful in this task, and a critical part of that task is the proper care and development of the children of those ministering in cross-cultural situations.

The chronicles of missionary history show an evolution in the care and education of missionary children. Early in the modern missions movement a significant percentage of children's education was carried on in the home country with children under the care of relatives or other surrogate parents. Soon the demands for closer relationships between parent and child led to the establishment of boarding schools in or near the country of the parents' ministry. Again, a kind of surrogate parenting took place in those schools, but the children had more frequent access to the parents through visits from the parents and more frequent and extended vacation periods. The separation experience at any level, depending upon many variables including the personality of the child, the intra-family dynamics, the attitudes and behavior of the teachers and surrogate parents in the school, and the length of separation, produced a variety of results in the children. Some of these results were positive, but some were negative with life-long implications. The writings of people from Pearl Buck to Ruth Van Reken reflect some of the unmet needs in missionary children.

It is not fair to judge harshly the people of the past. Decisions were made in the light available to them and under the influence of the cultural values of their own day. In

the last twenty-five years the Western family has experienced dramatic and often devastating change. As a result of this, within the community at large and particularly within the Christian community, there has been increased concern in the process of child rearing. The Christian community has been sensitized to the biblical mandates regarding the family, and a construction of the theology of the family is emerging. Against this background missionary candidates and those already established in missions have raised questions concerning their task as parents and the posture that they should have relative to the issues of family in ministry. Our tendency as humans is to swing pendulums, and sometimes in reaction to the ministry taking preeminence over the family there has been a tendency to make the family an end in itself and threaten other areas of responsibility. Perhaps the greatest task that lies ahead of us is to discern the real responsibilities, both family and ministry, and meet the crisis in development and education of our young people with those sensitivities in place.²

In the Christian community, the primary concern must be the person. The impact of our witness to the world is inextricably intertwined with our demonstrated care for one another (Jn 13:35; 17:21). The caring community is not simply a means to an end, but the very expression of whom we are as new creatures in Christ and the fruit-bearers of Christ's character expressed in a variety of ways to others, including the little ones and the least of these. Careful consideration of the task of development and education of the

² David C. Pollock, "Strategies for dealing with crisis missionary kid education," *International Bulletin Of Missionary Research* 13, no. 1: 13-19, ATLASerials, Religion Collection, EBSCOhost (accessed March 6, 2016), 410.

children of missionaries is not a side issue in the mission's community but, rather, a key part in the process of accomplishing our task.

Closely tied to the first concern is the matter of the potential of the MK. With all of the complicating issues in the growth of an MK there are the expanding, developing, growing factors that produce an individual with a worldview and a God view that are usually better developed than in the non-MK counterpart. The MK's linguistic and cross-cultural skills uniquely equip one for early and ongoing relationships across cultural barriers. If the MK's view is positive and healthy toward this experience, the MK not only is prepared to consider a career in missions or other cross-cultural endeavor, but also becomes a positive encouragement to mono-cultural people to consider the same. Any system that intensifies the negatives of being a global nomad and fails to facilitate the development of the positive is guilty of gross neglect in failing to unleash the potential of the MK community.

A final but critical consideration is the parent. Studies have demonstrated the impact of unsatisfactory family adjustment on the success of the cross-cultural worker. Stresses born of real or feared difficulties bear significantly on one's sense of well-being and on one's conviction of the correctness of vocational choices.³

Yet another critical consideration in decision-making is that of the education process itself. The demands of our society require education to fulfill certain reasonable expectations. To ignore the demands of one's society in this area may be an unnecessary sacrifice of one's children. If a mode of education meets the requirements of theology, child growth and development, parental emotional demands and ministry standards, but

³ Pollock, "Strategies for dealing with crisis," 14.

fails to satisfy educational criteria, it is obviously inadequate. The future of the child and the development and release of the child's potential are at stake. It is essential that we in the mission's community who are responsible for the MK's education bear in mind the issue of the pursuit of excellence. A part of this pursuit may involve provision for special-education needs of the children of missionary families. The child with a learning disability or other educational handicap cannot be a throwaway because the parents are missionaries. The gifted child, who often has an advantage as a third-culture kid (TCK), also has special needs and interests that should be a deep concern to us as well.

The internationalizing of education is a critical issue in a multinational and multicultural missionary community. The educational needs of non-North Americans must be considered and be factored into our consideration of alternatives in education. Altering our existing institutions and structures may be a costly and confusing task, but an essential one if we are to meet cross-cultural requirements. Inter-culturalizing our curriculum will also further the opportunity to develop the unique potential of the TCK to be a cross-cultural communicator and negotiator.

Trauma in the Church

In the book *Post Traumatic Church Syndrome* by Reba Riley, there are ten suggested general and nonthreatening ways of dealing with trauma in the church.

1. Give yourself permission to set up healthy boundaries.

This one should be the most obvious, but it is also the one we are quick to overlook or feel guilty for doing. However, one cannot heal while they are being actively re-injured. You would not expect a broken arm to heal if every weekend you did the same

activity that fractured your arm in the first place, would you? It is not only good but necessary to set up healthy boundaries between yourself and the people who continue to injure you. (And do not forget, sometimes unfriend and block can be a really healthy choice.)

2. Invest in a season of counseling.

Everyone needs a counselor. You are going to need a season of processing everything that happened, so settle into the office of a good therapist and stay as long as you need in order to work through some of this stuff. Once you do, you might wonder why you waited so long—if you embrace therapy there is a great deal of freedom to be found.

3. Be honest with yourself about what happened.

Most cases of church trauma are legitimate cases of trauma, injustice, and the like. However, there are also cases where churches did the right thing—confronting bullies, holding people accountable for abandoning their families, etc. If your trauma is not so much trauma as it is a story of how others tried to stop you from being a bully, or held you accountable for causing harm to others, own it and learn from it.

4. Own your crap about “before.”

If you go through the process of individual therapy, you are going to realize that your church trauma actually brought up a lot of crap from before. Whether it was your childhood or other past experiences, trauma has the tendency to bring up a lot of junk from the past. Part of healing is owning that crap, and asserting your power over it instead of its power over you. Until you acknowledge it and own it however, your junk may be driving the car and you might just be a passenger.

5. Find something healthy that pours into you, and do it.

Dealing with church trauma is a marathon, not a sprint. More than that, most people begin this journey already depleted, feeling beat up, and with little gas in the tank. If you are going to make it to the other side you must find a way to put gas in your tank. Just make sure this life-giving thing you do is not actually self-destructive and merely disguised as life giving.

6. Daily practice the release of anger, bitterness, and any other emotion that's eating you alive (or has the potential to).

This is not to say the anger, bitterness or whatever else you are feeling is wrong or less than totally legitimate... it is just that holding onto those emotions only hurt one person—ourselves. As justified as these emotions may be, they are corrosive in nature and dangerous to keep around for an extended period. The only way to beat them is to practice, practice, practice setting them aside and letting them go.

7. Stop listening to those old tapes in your head.

Bad church experiences end up becoming tapes with messages about ourselves that replay in our minds in the most unhelpful ways. This is because church trauma usually send us very specific messages about worth and identity that we internalize: you are bad, you will never measure up, God is angry with you, you are not good enough to be one of us, you will never be accepted, etc. These harmful messages end up replaying in our minds in new situations, and can keep driving the point home for a lifetime. We must learn to recognize when this record plays, and make the conscious decision to reject the message it is broadcasting.

8. Remember that those who harmed you are really broken people too.

This is not to give a free pass to abusers, and it does not mean we reconcile with those who would again harm us or re-abandon us, but it is important to remember they are broken people too—even if they can not see it, acknowledge it, or will never deal with it. They have old tapes that play in their mind too, and sometimes it's helpful for us to remember that.

9. Work at believing that those who harmed you did not speak for Jesus and were not acting on his behalf.

Too often we actually make a strange idol out of people who have harmed us in church. This happens when we functionally allow their words and actions towards us hold more weight than what Jesus said or what Jesus did. We must remember that Jesus speaks for Jesus, and they are not his mouthpiece.

10. Take a chance in new relationships.

This last one is the most difficult, but the most important of all. As scary as it may be, here is why you need to take a risk: since our trauma happened in the context of relationships, the only way we will find ultimate healing and freedom is in the context of relationships. It is hard and risky. But I also have discovered the only things that have truly begun to put balm over my church wounds, have been in the context of new relationships.⁴

⁴ Benjamin L. Corey, "10 Ways to Begin Dealing With Trauma in Your Church," accessed March 3, 2016, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/formerlyfundie/10-ways-to-begin-dealing-with-your-church-trauma/>.

Helping Your Church Heal After Trauma

If your church is to comprehensively heal after experiencing trauma, at least some help must come from outside its own walls. Pastors and their flocks can recover from a traumatic church event and go on to be even more effective in ministry. But in order for members of a congregation to recover from a critical incident like a shooting or an accident involving mass casualties, they often need something more than what the church has been historically equipped to offer.

Most pastoral leaders, though experts in spiritual care, are ill-equipped to deal with the psychological and physical impacts of a traumatic event. When a mass critical incident occurs within the church, the pastor is subject to the same overwhelming flood of emotions and psychic pain that others experience.

Human beings do not have to encounter trauma firsthand to be negatively impacted by it. Their exposure to the kinds of horrific stories and visual images that often follow in the wake of a critical incident can lead to secondary trauma. When members of a congregation lose close friends or loved ones in a critical event, they can be traumatized as well. When your church experiences a mass critical incident, everyone will be impacted by it.⁵

Caregivers who engage in helping trauma victims can become traumatized by close-up and prolonged involvement in the lives of those who are primary victims. As a spiritual leader, your willingness to listen tirelessly, encourage faithfully, and put the needs of others above your own, places you at an even higher risk for secondary trauma.

⁵ Deborah C. Bauer, "How to Help Your Church Heal after Trauma," accessed March 3, 2016, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140804024739-26176682-how-to-help-your-church-heal-after-trauma>.

Pastors are frequently left to cope with feelings of helplessness when they are unable to protect their parishioners from exposure to the carnage that accompanies a traumatic event. Many spiritual leaders experience their first real feelings of helplessness not in the pulpit, but when members of their congregations are victims of violence within the sanctity and safety of the walls of the church. When violence comes to your church you may find yourself dealing with new feelings of bewilderment, deep grief, and even anger. But who does a pastor turn to for help?

When a church experiences a shooting or a mass casualty involving multiple loss of life, its pastor's well-defined role as a spiritual leader and overseer changes quickly. With no warning, he is faced with the new and potentially overwhelming responsibility of becoming a trauma counselor. As his parishioners flock to his office looking for some way to make sense out of the senselessness, he is tasked with a job that is as humanly unmanageable as the feeding of the five thousand. He must continuously multiply his time and energies and pour himself out, offering, comfort, hope, and God's providence. In the days following a church trauma, many pastors will sacrifice their own needs for both emotional and spiritual healing.⁶

Shock, disbelief, and deep grief can consume the lives of those who survive a critical incident. Inside the church walls, these same feelings threaten to overwhelm both parishioners and spiritual leaders. And like the men and women in secular helping professions who mobilize after a crisis, a pastor and his wife can struggle with very real feelings of discouragement and the heavy weight of bearing burdens on a much bigger scale level.

⁶ Bauer, "How to Help Your Church Heal after Trauma."

So how can pastors survive traumatic church events and still effectively minister? Of equal importance, how can they help the members of their congregations cope in the aftermath of a critical incident that occurs on church property? In order to continue to be effective, those who are in ministry at the time of a critical incident need the assistance and support of professionals who are trained to help victims avoid the onset of acute or post-traumatic stress. There are men and women in ministry who will disagree with this contention, suggesting that psychological constructs and treatment strategies for critical incident stress have no place in the church. The basis for their disagreement often stems from a fear of psychology and a lack of appreciation of the value of understanding the complexities of the human mind. God, however, knows his people. He remembers that believers are subject to the same frailties as the rest of humanity. When weighed under the crushing blow of a traumatic event, He acknowledges that they need, not just spiritual comfort, but healing from psychic pain of distressing memories and unforgettable images. The same Holy Spirit who works through church staff can offer healing after a critical incident through the hands of trained trauma specialists.⁷

When pastors and their wives are victims of the same critical event that devastates their flock, it seems inconceivable that they can continue to function in their respective capacities. Yet history has shown that most church staff, which has experienced a church shooting or a mass casualty, feels a singular responsibility to offer both spiritual and trauma counseling to their parishioners. They will even refuse outside counseling and offers of help from community mental health organizations. Unfortunately, few pastors realize the importance of timely intervention during the first critical hours and first few days following a traumatic event. With little or no training in techniques like debriefing

⁷ Bauer, "How to Help Your Church Heal after Trauma,"

and diffusing their effectiveness is limited and frequently restricted to members of the congregation who knock on their office doors. The vast majority of traumatized men, women, and children, will slip through the cracks and go on to experience recurring bad dreams, startle responses, and generalized anxiety that can lead to both acute stress disorder and post-traumatic stress. Many of them will leave the church family due to the inability to cope with environmental triggers.⁸

Ideally, a pastoral staff needs to recognize its own vulnerability in the wake of a critical incident in the church. Spiritual leaders need to be willing to step aside from the primary role of crisis counseling and allow professionally trained counselors to oversee the process of helping God's people cope with the distressful images and chaotic emotions associated with a trauma. Pastors can still maintain oversight of their flocks but need to allow mental and emotional needs of traumatized people to be cared for by those who have the professional objectivity and the training to do so. Trauma survivors benefit from both spiritual support and professional help to assist them in coping with a deep shock to the human spirit. If you are a pastor or senior staff member of a local church, the time to mobilize a team of professionals to train your staff on critical incident protocol is now. By responsibly integrating pastoral care and trauma counseling, you can offer comprehensive help to your church body in the first few hours after a critical incident or until outside help arrives. Your trained trauma team can also mobilize to reach out to other local churches that have experienced a critical incident.⁹

⁸ Bauer, "How to Help Your Church Heal after Trauma."

⁹ Bauer, "How to Help Your Church Heal after Trauma."

Ideas for Church Outreach to Victims of Trauma and Tragedy

How can churches minister most effectively to victims of disaster and trauma?

What can we do as the Body of Christ to address some of these needs? First, we want you to know that our thoughts and prayers are with you, your family, and your congregation as you begin picking your way through the aftermath of this heart-wrenching experience.

An important first step in the right direction is making sure that your expectations are realistic. Bear in mind that a disaster is a disaster. It is one thing to deal with the normal strains and stresses of life. By way of contrast, the very meaning of the word trauma can be summed up as too much too quick. It is going to take time, determination, and perseverance to get past the pain and devastation that seem so paralyzing and all encompassing at the present moment.¹⁰

You are to be commended on your desire to reach out to others in the midst of this difficult situation. Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) tells the story of a man who cared enough to minister to a victim of a sudden and traumatic attack. The parable provides us with a clear example of what it means to help those who are suffering in the aftermath of a physical disaster. Among other things, the Samaritan models the following principles:

Compassion. Effective ministry involves willingness and an ability to enter into the feelings and experiences of other people. It's important to realize that there is no quick and easy way to reach out to victims of natural disasters and other tragedies. Events of this nature generally push people beyond the limits of anything they've ever had to

¹⁰ Focus on the Family, "Ideas for Church Outreach to Victims of Trauma and Tragedy," accessed March 3, 2016, http://family.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/26258/~/ideas-for-church-outreach-to-victims-of-trauma-and-tragedy.

endure before. Our first responsibility is simply to be with them and listen to them in their pain and confusion.

Selflessness and Flexibility. In order to help the bleeding man by the roadside the Samaritan had to interrupt his journey. Compassion compelled him to put his own plans on the back burner. We cannot follow his example unless we are willing to make the same kind of sacrifice. Lend a hand when it is needed, not just when it is convenient.

Emphasis on Practical Needs. Resist the temptation to over-spiritualize. "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food," writes James, "and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled.' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?" (Js 2:15, 16). When people are suffering, Christian workers sometimes jump too quickly into a message about eternal hope and salvation in Christ. Our first priority in a situation like this is to meet concrete needs. If you and your church are not in a position to do this, then get behind the efforts of relief organizations that are better trained and equipped to help.

Personal Ownership. The Samaritan assumed responsibility for the expense of the injured man's care (Lk 10:35). In effect, he said, "This is my problem, not somebody else's." You can do the same by supporting the relief effort with your time, your money, and your material resources. Churches can also help by offering counseling and small group support programs. Many victims need an opportunity to debrief about their losses and traumatic experiences.¹¹

One last thought. It is not easy reaching out to people who are in the midst of intense sufferings. If you are going to become involved in this kind of ministry, it is important to monitor your own physical, emotional, and spiritual condition very closely.

¹¹ Focus on the Family, "Ideas for Church Outreach to Victims of Trauma and Tragedy."

If you allow yourself to become depleted, you will not have anything to give to those who need your help.¹²

Dealing with the Effects of Trauma – A Self Help Guide

This is a serious issue. This offering is just an introduction—a starting point that may give you the courage to take action. It is not meant to be a treatment program. The ideas and strategies are not intended to replace treatment you are currently receiving.

You may have had one or many very upsetting, frightening, or traumatic things happen to you in your life, or that threatened or hurt something you love—even your community. When these kinds of things happen, you may not get over them quickly. In fact, you may feel the effects of these traumas for many years, even for the rest of your life. Sometimes you do not even notice effects right after the trauma happen. Years later you may begin having thoughts, nightmares, and other disturbing symptoms. You may develop these symptoms and not even remember the traumatic thing or things that once happened to you.¹³

For many years, the traumatic things that happened to people were overlooked as a possible cause of frightening, distressing, and sometimes disabling emotional symptoms such as depression, anxiety, phobias, delusions, flashbacks, and being out of touch with reality. In recent years, many researchers and health care providers have become convinced of the connection between trauma and these symptoms. They are developing

¹² Focus on the Family, “Ideas for Church Outreach to Victims of Trauma and Tragedy.”

¹³ New Hampshire University, “Dealing with the Effects of Trauma – A Self Help Guide,” accessed March 3, 2016, <https://www.unh.edu/counseling-center/dealing-effects-trauma-%E2%80%93-self-help-guide>.

new treatment programs and revising old ones to better meet the needs of people who have had traumatic experiences.

This offering can help you to know if traumatic experiences in your life may be causing some or all of the difficult symptoms you are experiencing. It may give you some guidance in working to relieve these symptoms and share with you some simple and safe things you can do to help yourself heal from the effects of trauma.¹⁴

Some examples of traumatic experiences that may be causing your symptoms include:

- Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
- Neglect
- War experiences
- Outbursts of temper and rage
- Alcoholism (your own or in your family)
- Physical illnesses, surgeries, and disabilities
- Sickness in your family
- Loss of close family members and friends
- Natural disasters
- Accidents¹⁵

Some things that may be very traumatic to one person hardly seem to bother another person. If something bothers you a lot and it does not bother someone else, it

¹⁴ New Hampshire University, "Dealing with the Effects of Trauma."

¹⁵ New Hampshire University, "Dealing with the Effects of Trauma."

does not mean there is something wrong with you. People respond to experiences differently.

Do you feel that traumatic things that happened to you may be causing some or all of your distressing and disabling emotional symptoms? Examples of symptoms that may be caused by trauma include:

- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Agitation
- Irritability or rage
- Flashbacks or intrusive memories
- Feeling disconnected from the world
- Unrest in certain situations
- Being “shut down”
- Being very passive
- Feeling depressed
- Eating problems
- Needing to do certain things over and over
- Unusual fears
- Impatience
- Always having to have things a certain way
- Doing strange or risky things
- Having a hard time concentrating
- Wanting to hurt yourself

- Being unable to trust anyone
- Feeling unlikable
- Feeling unsafe
- Using harmful substances
- Keeping to yourself
- Overworking¹⁶

Perhaps you have been told that you have a psychiatric or mental illness like depression, bipolar disorder or manic depression, schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, dissociative disorder, an eating disorder, or an anxiety disorder. The ways you can help yourself handle these symptoms and the things your health care providers suggest as treatment may be helpful whether your symptoms are caused by trauma or by a psychiatric illness.

Wherever you go for help, the program or treatment should include the following:

- *Empowerment*—You must be in charge of your healing in every way to counteract the effects of the trauma where all control was taken away from you.
- *Validation*—You need others to listen to you, to validate the importance of what happened to you, to bear witness, and to understand the role of this trauma in your life.
- *Connection*—Trauma makes you feel very alone. As part of your healing, you need to reconnect with others. This connection may be part of your treatment.

If you feel the cause of your symptoms is related to trauma in your life, you will want to be careful about your treatment and in making decisions about other areas of your life. The following guidelines will help you decide how to help yourself feel better.

¹⁶ New Hampshire University, “Dealing with the Effects of Trauma.”

Have hope. It is important that you know that you can and will feel better. In the past you may have thought you would never feel better—that the horrible symptoms you experience would go on for the rest of your life. Many people who have experienced the same symptoms that you are experiencing are now feeling much better. They have gone on to make their lives the way they want them to be and to do the things they want to do.

Take personal responsibility. When you have been traumatized, you lose control of your life. You may feel as though you still do not have any control over your life. You begin to take back that control by being in charge of every aspect of your life. Others, including your spouse, family members, friends, and health care professionals will try to tell you what to do. Before you do what they suggest, think about it carefully. Do you feel that it is the best thing for you to do right now? If not, do not do it. You can follow others advice, but be aware that you are choosing to do so. It is important that you make decisions about your own life. You are responsible for your own behavior. Being traumatized is not an acceptable excuse for behavior that hurts you or hurts others.

Talk to one or more people about what happened to you. Telling others about the trauma is an important part of healing the effects of trauma. Make sure the person or people you decide to tell are safe people, people who would not hurt you, and who understand that what happened to you is serious. They should know, or you could tell them, that describing what happened to you over and over is an important part of the healing process. Do not tell a person who responds with statements that invalidate your experience, like “That wasn’t so bad.” “You should just forget about it.” “Forgive and forget,” or “You think that’s bad, let me tell you what happened to me.” They do not understand. In connecting with others, avoid spending all your time talking about your

traumatic experiences. Spend time listening to others and sharing positive life experiences, like going to movies or watching a ball game together. You will know when you have described your trauma enough, because you won't feel like doing it anymore.

Develop a close relationship with another person. You may not feel close to or trust anyone. This may be a result of your traumatic experiences. Part of healing means trusting people again. Think about the person in your life that you like best. Invite them to do something fun with you. If that feels good, make a plan to do something else together at another time—maybe the following week. Keep doing this until you feel close to this person. Then, without giving up on that person, start developing a close relationship with another person. Keep doing this until you have close relationships with at least five people. Support groups and peer support centers are good places to meet people.¹⁷

Things You Can Do Every Day to Help Yourself Feel Better

There are many things that happen every day that can cause you to feel ill, uncomfortable, upset, anxious, or irritated. You will want to do things to help yourself feel better as quickly as possible, without doing anything that has negative consequences, for example, drinking, committing crimes, hurting yourself, risking your life, or eating lots of junk food.

- Read through the following list
- Do something fun or creative
- Get some exercise

¹⁷ New Hampshire University, "Dealing with the Effects of Trauma."

- Write something
- Use your spiritual resources
- Do something routine
- Wear something that makes you feel good
- Get some little things done
- Learn something new¹⁸

Begin your healing journey by thinking about how it is you would like to feel.

Write it down or tell someone else. In order to promote your own healing, you may want to work on one or several of the following issues that you know would help you to feel better.

If you are now about to begin working on recovering from the effects of trauma, or if you have already begun this work and are planning to continue making some changes based on what you have learned, you will need courage and persistence along the way. You may experience setbacks. From time to time you may get so discouraged that you feel like you want to give up. This happens to everyone. Notice how far you have come. Appreciate even a little progress. Do something nice for yourself and continue your efforts. You deserve an enjoyable life. Always keep in mind that there are many people, even famous people, who have had traumatic things happen to them. They have worked to relieve the symptoms of this trauma and have gone on to lead happy and rewarding lives. You can too.¹⁹

¹⁸ New Hampshire University, "Dealing with the Effects of Trauma."

¹⁹ New Hampshire University, "Dealing with the Effects of Trauma."

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

For many, life is viewed as polar opposites. There are those who have no cares or concerns and appear to be doing better and getting more than those who seek to do the right thing. There are those who, at all cost, seek to obtain as much as possible, regardless of those who are injured, maimed or killed in the process. The above dichotomy clearly illustrates a need and desire to create a sacred space for those who suffer in silence, to empower sufferers to speak up, and to demonstrate to the masses that sufferers have more in common with non-sufferers than they have that separate them. This revelation can be made possible when the kingdom of God called church is willing to transcend to a higher level of service within the congregation and community in which we are privileged serve.

Active, critical reflection has revealed issues of trauma, pain and confusion that can be used to the glory of God in kingdom building if sufferers can develop the strength to surrender to God's good and perfect will. The project analysis will seek to verify the presuppositions and hypothesis stated in this project based on foundational research and models that work to reduce the impact in the lives of people who experience trauma.

Methodology

The journey toward project completion began long before implementation. On November 13, 2014 in a scheduled private meeting with the pastor to discuss possible projects and approaches, the pastor encouraged meetings with the Steward Board to bring them up to speed on the overall DMin process in order to get their support in addition to obtaining their approval in completing the project. The response of the Steward Board was positive with all the members offering support for whatever is needed for the successful implementation and completion of the project. It was agreed upon at a subsequent meeting on January 5, 2015 that the project would consist of a pre and post survey, a sermon series and a symposium on community resources and Safe Sanctuary if time allotted.

Context Associates

Having met with and gained the approval of the pastor and Steward Board, the push shifted to recruiting various members to serve as Context Associates. Of the twenty-one candidates that were identified and asked to serve in this capacity, eight agreed. Thus the Context Associates for this project consists of two men and six women from varying backgrounds such as a sitting municipal court judge, two physicians, a retired firefighter, an educator, a police officer, a social worker and a business owner.

The Context Associates had the responsibility of working with the project from the beginning of the implementation process to the final data analysis and write up. They were responsible for distributing the pre and posttest and assisting to tabulate the results.

Once the results were tabulated, the Context Associates assisted in the data interpretation and make sure that results of the project were fairly reported.

The Context Associates were also responsible for distributing and passing out data reporting instruments used in the Bible study process as well as the trauma symposium. They were instrumental in putting the participants at ease and demonstrated that the program was being supported and affirmed by the leadership of the church. Their presences spoke volumes toward breaking down barriers and hesitancy of the participants to fully engage the process.

An official meeting of the Context Associates was convened on August 21, 2015 with the goal of establishing a pre and post survey to be distributed. Food and refreshments were provided. All were invited while only five were able to be physically present. The two physicians and the police officer that could not attend provided feedback via email and their suggestions were included. The meeting was opened with prayer and scripture, Micah 6:1-8 and Luke 18:1-10 were the project focus texts read by Reverend Storms. Research and statistics gleaned thus far were shared along with the overall project goal which was to determine whether or not exposure to traumatic events adversely effect an individual's experience of God and worship.

This goal was developed from the earlier hypothesis that exposure to traumatic events negatively impacts an individual's experience of both God and worship. Following much discussion, it was decided to include the following information on the survey:

- Gender
- Age range
- What is your current understanding of trauma

- Have you experienced a trauma in the previous twelve months
- What was the nature of the trauma
- Did your trauma positively or negatively affect your view of God
- Did your trauma positively or negatively affect your view of worship
- Did your trauma positively or negatively affect your relationship with other members
- Did you seek professional assistance in coping with your particular traumatic event.

The information for the post survey was decided to consist of the following:

- Gender
- Age range
- Did the sermon series impact your understanding of trauma
- Will you seek professional help in coping with your trauma
- Will you participate in a ministry that address trauma

These questions were chosen because they provided a wealth of information while maintaining privacy.

Professional Associates

The Professional Associates acted as editors, critical readers, and they pushed me toward maintaining focus. At times, the Professional Associates gave recommendations that challenged my personal goals and desires for the program. While they were not adversarial, their insistence and firm positions allowed me to push past my personal biases and see the project in the context of what was being reported rather than me guiding the project to a preferred end.

Toward the end of the process and as I began to prepare for my oral examination, the Professional Associates went through the document and made sure that I was able to articulate the substantive issues presented in the research and that I was able to systematically articulate the problem, hypothesis, methodology and results of the data. Their participation in helping to prepare the written final document and the oral examination were invaluable.

Implementation

In an effort to stay within the time constraints imposed on this project, it was necessary to develop a project calendar and timeline. The project calendar and timeline provided direction, focus, and structure to the implementation phase as a whole. By having this document available and distributed to the context and professional associates in advance, they were able to assist in moving the project along by consistently keeping the project from stalling and the participants from spending too much time on any one issue or area. This not only expedited the process, it also helped to respect the time of those who graciously gave of their time in making this project a reality.

It was noted that because of the timeline, participants felt a sense of organization, which created a desire in the participants to continue coming back over the duration of the project. This was especially true since the project implementation was spread over an extended period of time to include the Thanksgiving and Christmas Holiday seasons. Had the calendar and project calendar not been available, we may not have been able to keep the participants together as a collective group and the results of the project would have not been as substantive.

Project Calendar and Timeline

The project calendar and timeline were used to keep the project on target and allowed the Context Associates to assist me in implementing the overall project. By having the calendar and timeline available, the Context Associates were able to reconcile their personal affairs around the work they committed to do on the project ensuring that sufficient support was given throughout the entire process.

- August 21, 2015 Meet with Contextual Associates to develop Pre-Questionnaire.
- August 30, 2015 Distribute and collect Pre-Surveys (one service). Preach first sermon of two part series.
- September 6, 2015 Distribute and collect Pre-Surveys (two services). Preach second sermon of two part series.
- February 2016 Meet with contextual associates to review survey responses and analyze the data. Begin planning Symposium for March on Safe-Sanctuaries as well as information fair. Develop Post-Survey for distribution and collection and Symposium.
- March 2016 Host Safe-Sanctuary Symposium and information fair.
- March 2016 Meet with Contextual Associates to analyze final data received from Post Survey. Write conclusion and submit final document for approval.

Pre and Posttest Surveys

The following information was extracted from the surveys that were distributed and collected over three consecutive Sunday's and five worship services on August 30, 2015. Three hundred surveys were prepared and distributed. Two hundred and twenty nine congregants were present with 151 persons completing and returning the survey, which comprised approximately 50% of those distributed.

Pre Test Results

Gender

| Gender | # Members Responding | % Members responding |
|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Male | 68 | 26% |
| Female | 186 | 71% |
| Not Indicated | 7 | 3% |

From this demographic, it was evident that more women participated in the project than men, however, this stands to reason, as the ratio of men to women in the congregation is 75% women and 25% men.

Age Range

| Age/Number Responding | # Members Responding | % Members Responding |
|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 18-34 | 23 | 9% |
| 35-4 | 45 | 19% |
| 50-69 | 117 | 48% |
| 70+ | 58 | 24% |

This demographic demonstrated the desire to have the entire church population participate in the program. As indicated by the data, the largest number of participants were between thirty-five and sixty-nine. However, the data also shows that young adults and older adults played a significant role in gathering the data.

Have You Experienced Trauma in Your Life

| | # Members Responding | % Members Responding |
|-----|----------------------|----------------------|
| Yes | 154 | 64% |
| No | 88 | 36% |

Surprisingly, there were a significant number of participants who acknowledged that they have experienced some form of trauma in their lives. This is important because it indicates that the planned symposium would have strong attendance and participation.

Nature of Your Trauma

| Nature of Trauma | # Members Responding | % Members Responding |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Violence | 16 | 9% |
| Physical Abuse/Assault | 12 | 7% |
| Sexual Abuse/Assault | 9 | 5% |
| Job Loss | 19 | 11% |
| Verbal Abuse/Assault | 19 | 11% |
| Car Accident | 20 | 12% |
| Unexpected Death | 33 | 19% |
| Loss of Relationship | 24 | 14% |
| Medical DX | 12 | 7% |
| Other (Not Listed) | 8 | 5% |

This demographic indicate that there is a wealth of trauma that is experienced throughout the congregation. This is important as it shows that trauma is not relegated to abuse, assault or accidents. Trauma takes on many forms and the data indicates that of the persons participating in the project, the types of trauma are somewhat equally distributed.

How Has Trauma Affected Your View Of God

| | | |
|------------|-----|-----|
| Positively | 110 | 72% |
| Negatively | 22 | 15% |
| Both | 21 | 13% |

Initially, it was presupposed that trauma would have a negative affect on a person's view of God. According to the data, over 72% of those responding indicated that trauma led them to God rather than away from God. This was a very positive sign in assisting people overcome the effects of trauma.

How Has Trauma Affected Your Worship Experience

| | | |
|------------|-----|-----|
| Positively | 101 | 75% |
| Negatively | 23 | 17% |
| Both | 3 | 2% |
| Neither | 2 | 1% |
| Unknown | 5 | 5% |

Again, just as the data indicated that trauma leads people to God rather than away from God, the data also shows that people who suffer the effects of trauma are also predisposed to entering into worship in positive ways.

How Has Trauma Affected Your Relationship with Congregants

| | | |
|------------|----|-----|
| Positively | 98 | 74% |
| Negatively | 13 | 10% |
| Unknown | 16 | 12% |
| Both | 3 | 3% |
| Neither | 1 | 1% |

Not only does trauma lead people to God and worship, data indicates that trauma also causes people to have positive relationships with other persons in the congregation .

Have You Sought Professional Assistance For Your Trauma

| | | |
|-----|----|-----|
| Yes | 47 | 37% |
| No | 79 | 63% |

This question indicated that while people have trauma and are led to God and worship as a result of trauma, almost one-third of those responding indicated that they have not sought professional assistance regarding their trauma. It would be interesting to determine if this number is based on fear, lack of insurance or ignorance.

Overall Assessment

Among these, 229 congregants present sixty-eight or 45% reported they had experienced a traumatic event within the previous twelve months while seventy-eight or 52% reported they had not. Of the 45% that reported they had, five indicated Violence (personal or witnessed); four or 3% reporting Physical Abuse/Assault; three or 2% stated Sexual Abuse/Assault; nine or 6% reporting Job Loss; nine or 6% reporting Verbal Abuse/Assault; eight or 5% reported Car Accident; eighteen or 12% Unexpected Death; ten or 7% Loss of Relationship; eighteen or 12% Medical Diagnosis and eighteen or 12% reporting their particular traumatic event was other than what was listed. Fifty-two or 35% stated the trauma affected their view of God positively while sixteen or 11% reported a negative affect. The results were identical when asked the impact on their worship experience with fifty-two or 35% reporting a positive affect and sixteen or 11% indicating a negative affect. The same was true for the impact on relationships with fellow congregants with fifty-two or 35% reporting a positive effect and ten or 7% reporting a negative impact. When asked if professional help had been sought in coping with their traumatic experience, twenty-two or 15% reported they had and forty-three or 28% reported they had not.

Post Test Results

The results of the post test serve to determine if there were any changes in attitude or growth from the participants after the ministry model was concluded.

Gender

| Gender | # Members Responding | % Members responding |
|--------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Male | 11 | 30% |
| Female | 26 | 70% |

At the end of the project, the posttest results show a slight increase in the number of men responding to the questionnaire than the pre test. Although there is a slight increase, it did not impact the data significantly.

Has Your Awareness of Trauma Increased Since This Presentation

| | | |
|-----|----|-----|
| Yes | 35 | 94% |
| No | 2 | 6% |

Since 94% of those responding say that their awareness of trauma increased since the pre test, it would indicate that the program was successful in educating the participants about what trauma is and how it can be treated.

Nature of the Trauma

| Nature of Trauma | # Members Responding | % Members Responding |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Violence | 1% | 33% |
| Physical Abuse/Assault | 0 | 0% |
| Sexual Abuse/Assault | 1 | 33% |

| | | |
|----------------------|---|-----|
| Job Loss | 0 | 0% |
| Verbal Abuse/Assault | 0 | 0% |
| Car Accident | 0 | 0% |
| Unexpected Death | 1 | 33% |
| Loss of Relationship | 0 | 0% |
| Medical DX | 0 | 0% |
| Other (Not Listed) | 0 | 0% |

At the end of the program, few people answered this question and therefore the data results are not reliable.

Since Presentation Have You Sought Assistance With Your Trauma

| | | |
|-----|----|-----|
| Yes | 1 | 2% |
| No | 37 | 98% |

Although the participants were given quality information regarding trauma, more people stated that they do not seek assistance because of their trauma.

Are You Aware of Community Resources to Overcome Trauma

| | | |
|-----|----|-----|
| Yes | 35 | 92% |
| No | 3 | 8% |

This question shows that an overwhelming number of participants are aware of the resources available to them in the community to deal with trauma, however, based on the prior question, getting professional help has not been a viable option.

Will You Support a Trauma Support Ministry of the Church

| | | |
|-----|----|-----|
| Yes | 34 | 89% |
| No | 4 | 11% |

This question indicates that a large majority of those represented in the study would support a trauma support ministry in the church. This is promising as supporting a trauma support group at the church may lead to seeking professional help for trauma.

Are You Willing to Share Your Testimony About Trauma

| | | |
|-----|----|-----|
| Yes | 13 | 29% |
| No | 32 | 71% |

This last question indicates that although members have participated in a study regarding trauma and are knowledgeable about the effects of trauma, and are willing to support a church based trauma ministry, they are still unwilling to share their testimony regarding their trauma to others.

Overall Assessment

On September 6, 2015 two worship services were conducted and the following information was extracted from the returned surveys. During the 8:00 a.m. worship service, 125 surveys were distributed with ninety-nine congregants present and twenty-eight surveys returned. Out of the twenty-eight surveys returned twenty-five or 89% reported experiencing a traumatic event within the previous twelve months with three or 11% reporting they had not. Of the twenty-five that had experienced a trauma four or 4% indicated Violence (personal or witnessed); three or 11% Physical Abuse/Assault; four or 14% Sexual Abuse/Assault; six or 21% Job Loss; eight or 29% Verbal Abuse/Assault; eight or 29% Car Accident; fourteen or 50% Unexpected Death; seven or 25% Loss of Relationship; four or 14% Medical Diagnosis with three or 11% stating their trauma was not listed. Twenty or 71% state the impact on their relationship with God was positive with only one reporting a negative impact.

One reported neither; one reported both and two did not respond to that question. Nineteen or 68% stated the traumatic experience positively impacted their worship experience with two indicating a negative impact. Again one indicated both, one reported neither and two failed to respond to that question. Interesting is the fact that eighteen or 64% claimed the trauma had a positive impact on their relationships with other congregants with one reporting both and five or 8% indicating no effect at all. Additionally eight or 29% reported seeking professional help in coping with the trauma while seventeen or 61% reported they had not.

During the 11:00 a.m. worship service on September 6, 2015, 225 surveys were prepared and distributed. One hundred eighty-seven congregants were present during the service with forty-two of the surveys completed and returned. Among the surveys

returned nine or 21% were male while thirty-one or 74% were female with two of the surveys discarded because the persons placed their name on the form. Thirty-six or 86% reported having experienced a traumatic event within the previous twelve months with four or 1% stating they had not. Of the thirty-six who had twelve or 29% were Violence(personal or witnessed); nine or 21% Physical Ahuse/Assault; five or 12% Sexual Abuse/Assault; thirteen or 31% Job Loss; eleven or 26% (6%) Verbal Abuse/Assault; fourteen or 33% Car Accident; nineteen or 45% Unexpected Death; seventeen or 40% Medical Diagnosis and five or 12% reporting other. Thirty or 71% reported a positive view of God with Five or 12% reporting an negative view of God as a result of the trauma; Thirty or 71% report a positive impact on worship experience with three or 2% indicating a negative impact; twenty-eight or 66% state a positive impact on relationships with fellow congregants with three or 2% indicating a negative impact; and seventeen or 40% stated they sought professional help while nineteen or 45% claiming they had not.

The post survey was distributed over two worship services on the next Sunday September 13, 2015. The survey revealed results that were astonishing and unexpected. First and foremost it should be noted that the hypothesis was blown out of the water. Operating from an understanding and belief that exposure to traumatic events would lead a person to have a negative view and experience of both God and worship was proven to be false. Drawing from years of working with Veterans recovering from PTSD and TBI who overwhelmingly claim that their trauma's have led them to have a negative view and experience of God and worship lead to the belief that it was the exposure to trauma that created this environment. It appears that the completed survey's reveal that it is deeper

than merely exposure to trauma but the nature of the trauma, which leads to a negative view and experience.

It was also discovered through the results of the survey that there are more members in the pew that have been affected by trauma's than were initially anticipated with the majority reporting that the trauma had a positive impact on the view and experience of God and worship. What's even more shocking is the number of congregants that report being the victims of Sexual Abuse/Assault with the previous twelve months.

Sermons

Two sermons were preached during the testing period. These sermons were designed to show how trauma is treated in the scriptures and how God deals with persons dealing with trauma.

The first sermon was taken from Micah 6:1-8 and cross-referenced Luke 18: 1-8. The general theme of the sermon was "Your Hurt Matters to God," and the title of the sermon was "Exposed for Elevation. This sermon had three major points:

- a) We are a unified body of Christ
- b) Must go through grieving process
- c) We are never alone, God is with you

The second sermon was taken from Mark 9: 38-42. It was also under the general theme of "Your Hurt Matters to God," and the title of the sermon was "God has God's Hand on Us." The three main points of the sermon were:

- a) You're not in this by yourself

- b) Healing begins with forgiveness
- c) Remember to name your pain

Conclusion

The theme of this project was congregational leadership's awareness of trauma and its effect on members and the life of the church. While worship, spiritual disciplines and spiritual growth are hallmarks of the Christian church; congregants are often plagued with issues and circumstances that the church is ill equipped to handle appropriately. The time has come for congregational leaders to accept that professional outsourcing, especially in the areas of mental health and family therapy is a component of how God holistically ministers to the total person.

The project's hypothesis was if the issues of emotional and psychological trauma are addressed differently from spiritual concerns in the context of church, healing and wholeness can begin in the life of those affected by trauma.

The data analysis and the results of the project revealed that the stated hypothesis was disproven and that people with trauma do not have an overall adverse view of God and worship. This was an important discovery because it says that people's relationship with God is greater than their circumstances and that their faith in God does not waver in spite the difficulties they face in life. Life happens and God is present with God's people in the midst of the vicissitudes that occur each and everyday.

The results of the project revealed that spiritual maturity transcends the various challenges of life. To witness people emerge from a process of learning about trauma to be willing to share their testimony in the midst of pain has been a remarkable experience.

Prior to the project, the presupposition was that because people were suffering and dealing with various kinds of trauma, that it would create an adverse affect and relationship with God.

The project revealed a number of factors that could have improved the results and possibly a greater possibility of those who participated actually seeking professional assistance. First, this type of study should have been conducted over a longer period of time giving the participants an opportunity to find safe sanctuary and a greater sense of confidentiality. This was noted in the large number of participants who said they would not be comfortable sharing their testimony with others. Also, the posttest had significantly fewer participants skewing the results of the findings.

The fact that the project hypothesis was disproven gave me reason to pause and once again reflect on my own life and the many battles and struggles faced while dealing with issues of trauma, hurt, isolation, loneliness, and abandonment that was wreaking havoc in my spirit. I was searching for acceptance, approval, and understanding, which could not be found in material possessions or human relationships. The recognition that God was not the cause of my trauma and trouble but that God was there in the midst of all that I was going through and was leading and guiding me to be able to accept an invitation to a lifetime of ordained ministry using the experiences of my own past to provide healing, hope, and wholeness to more people than I could have ever imagined is both liberating and healing.

The implementation of the project allows me to deal with deeper issues in my preaching, teaching, and pastoral care regarding trauma within the life of the

congregation because the project articulated and began a welcoming and positive conversation that would otherwise exist in silence.

The manner in which this survey can be replicated and expanded is amazing. It can be examined solely upon gender or age range or specific trauma experienced etc. Since the project indicated that a large number of church members in the context suffer with trauma, it stands to reason that members of other congregations also suffer with trauma; possibly in silence. By using the foundational research from this project, along with the data instruments used to extrapolate data, any congregation can take this project model and make it useful in conducting similar studies in their context. The results of this project model provide a wealth of possibility for congregations who have members who suffer from a variety of traumas. Because people generally do not abandon their faith in God, provides an opportunity for congregations to establish ministries that deal with the various forms of trauma in healthy and empowering ways.

This project made a tremendous impact on the congregation and me. It allowed me to engage members at a deeper pastoral level and also allow them to gain confidence in my ability to treat them with positive regard and confidentiality. I learned that I have had a skewed view of the effects on trauma and in many ways allowed my views of trauma to become normative in the life of my church. I am extremely glad that I was able to see that God is greater than the circumstances that people experience in life and that members were confident that God would not and did not leave or abandon them in times of trouble.

The most valuable part of this project, although the hypothesis was disproven is the illumination of the power of God as an ever-present force and power in our lives.

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